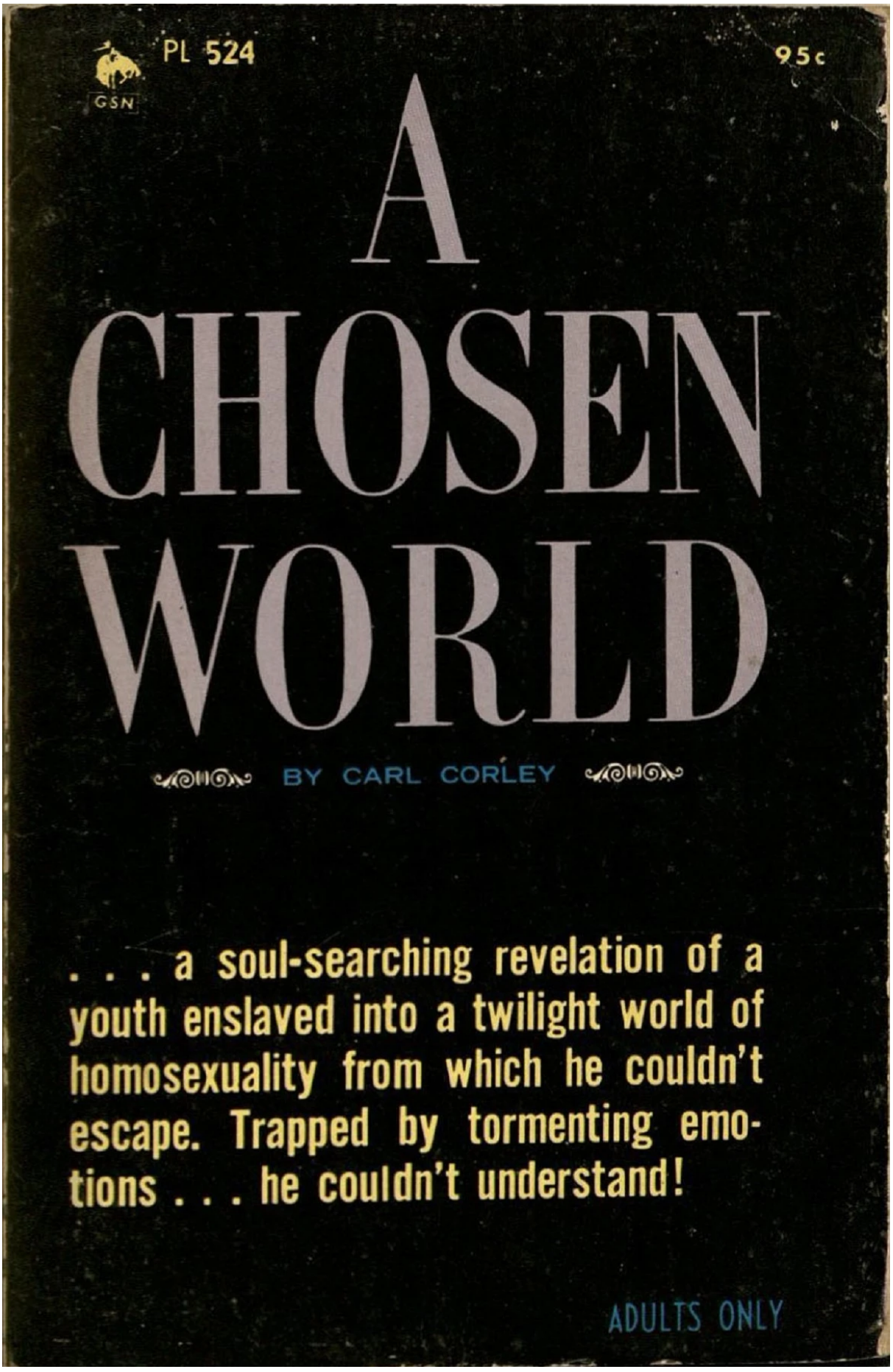
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A CHOSEN WORLD
BY CARL CORLEY
. . . a soul-searching revelation of a youth enslaved into a twilight world of homosexuality from which he couldn't escape. Trapped by tormenting emotions . . . he couldn't understand!
ADULTS ONLY

ATTENTION

THIS BOOK IS A WORK OF FICTION AND WAS WRITTEN FOR ADULT LITERARY ENJOYMENT.
WHILE THE BASIC THEME MAY HAVE OC CURRED MANY, MANY TIMES IN REAL LIFE. . .ALL OF THE CHARACTERS, INCIDENTS AND EVENTS WERE CREATED FROM THE AUTHOR'S IMAGINATION.
THE PRIMARYPURPOSE. . .IS TO CHRONICLE FICTIONALLY. . .THE WAY OF LIFE OF OUR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY.

. . . . .THE EDITOR

A CHOSEN WORLD

BY CARL CORLEY

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CHAPTER ONE

I can understand the violence of nature, of rain and wind and storms, for that is as God intended.

But I will never understand the violence of men.

Nor their passions.

Yet, I have lived in violence all the days of my life. Perhaps this is as it should be. Born of the artists — for the artists joy and sorrow – I hated a settled life like a wild cat hates a cage. Births, marriage, deaths, church, rural happenings, society, rules, meant nothing to me, and were as nothing in that life I created for myself. Even at an early age, a life to which I sentenced myself long before I knew of its perils, its ecstacies, its tragic beauty, and most of all — its violence.

It was Spring. And during that year 1935, of which I will always remember — both as an ecstasy and as a hate, the bright yellow leaves of the sycamores towering over the little corrugated shower house behind the football field at school, shed themselves upon that rusty roof, and so that year we had a bit of autumn in our May'

I was fifteen. I was goodlooking, or thought I was then. Above the average in build, yet on the petite side, not in a girlish way naturally, but a miniature, so to speak, of men taller and broader. I was fairly athletic, that is to say I was not captain of the football team, but I did go out for track, excelled in swimming, and boasted thick, shapely legs and well rounded arms and chest. My torso set upon my hips like a throne and I knew how to walk, not with the springy stride of the athlete, with the heel striking the ground first then to arch to the tip of the toes, but with the exact stride of the military. A little exaggerated, a little pompous. But I was healthy, lustful with life, proud of my youth and prouder still, that my youth had never tarnished. Then, l was innocent, child-like, and happy, and a little over trustful of human nature. Too trustful. Had I been more cynical, more optimistic about nature, a little more wary of others around me. The life to which I sentenced myself would never have materialized and I would have found expression in some other form of torture, or rapture, would have observed it in others in searching out my own.

But life in the country is simple, especially in the South. There is a permanency to it, an idleness, a slow moving grace which defies time and things never change. Events merely merge one into the other, like springs merges into summer and summer into fall and winter. And when one is young, like I was then, and oh, so callow, passion burns through the body like a living flame. And the quest for difference, of any nature, the desire, the longing to be known, burns a bright path to anarchy and to the food of the flesh.

I was in the ninth grade. Our school was a country one, so country, it seemed not like a school at all but a misguided prison, with dark red brick walls glaring in the sun beyond the huge oaks, with the smell of lunches in brown paper bags, of chalk dust, of creosite on plank floors, of coal in the winter, of outside toilets and of sweaty male flesh under the showers. I can still remember those smells. And that smell of the naked football players under the rain water showers dominates them all. It dominated my life. It became the essence, the perfume, the siren song that was to load me, that was dictate to me, that was to beguile me, in that ever after of our shallow beginnings, both the poison and the wine.

Often, during the evenings before school closed, that two hour long recess before the yellow wooden buses came to park under the shade of the oaks at the rear of the school, later to carry us over the back woods dirt roads to home, I would go down to the tin shower house and talk to the football boys as they came in off the freshly mown field to shower and dress before catching their buses.

One particularly dull afternoon I came upon the shower house a little late. All the boys had showered and gone except one — Norman.

He smiled when he saw me come up to the little window without panes which let in the air and the world outside, which had become a sound transmitter for all the giggling girls who, when walking along the path to their toilet, hurried by, their heads held purposely askew, their hands over their lips, their hysterical laughter like a den of witches in Macbeth.

Norman was a big, ox of a boy. A head taller than

the other football players, and a much broader, with skin as white as milk and a riot of blond curls on his head that coiled like snakes over his cornflower blue eyes and always smelled of brilliantine. His mouth was too large for his face, a deep red diagonal line, but that face was rustic enough to have withstood any deformity and yet attained a mammoth handsomeness. His face was carved, as if from granite, with wide set eyes and cheekbones, protuding chin, dimpled, and wrinkled brows. A brow of the primitive, savage natures, but noble, somehow, majestic, even in this rural primeval world of moss and magnoila. He was as Southern as a boll of cotton,

Automatically, I threw one leg up and over the window sill, then the other, splashing the water which ran wild a full inch upon the moss green concrete flooring.

Norman asked me to hand him a towel. And as I did so, pivoting my body inward so as to protect my shoes as much as possible from the water flowing over him, he playfull swept me into his arms. In that same instant he bent and kissed me.

In that instant I changed. Fate abrooded my world. Whatever I had been before, whatever I had hoped to become, I would never be again, would never become. I changed.

Norman, with that simple little flick of affection, hough harmless it was, set the pattern that was to dominate my life.

Later, when I look back to remember those times, and in remembering try to shift the blame to something else, to someone else, I never think of Norman as my afflictor, for he became, in time, the symbol I was to forever seek out in other men, the image I would always search out in those lonely dark alleyways of love. But in truth, in refactories from my ideal, it was Norman and Norman alone who set my feet upon that tarnished road that was to lead down into those stealthy catacombs, those lavender lit caverns. those valleys between the canyons of stone and marble and steel and those rosv lamps that would guide me, beckon to me — that would always put me under their spell.

Yes. Norman — Norman who later loved me, loved me almost nightlv, and who treated me like I was a girl. His huge body, on those starry nights down in the pas-

ture by a creek which kept dabbling at sounds like a dog lapping at water, completely covered my world. He was enormous, but he was as lovable as a collie, and my body, my callow, ignorant body, during those times those times I will always remember and will long to remember after I am dead, yearned for that pain he gave me so abundantly. My simple, inexperienced body, naive to such things — deplored by their mere possibility – the meaning of it upsetting the very epitome of my early teachings, the church, the community. My body ached for his hard hands, my tears flowing long before he hurt me, flowing by that rememberance of pain the last night before. Yet, I was as putty in his arms, surrendering to the last fiber of my being, pliable to his moulding, and hardening to what he had fashioned out of me, the completed symbol of his own creation.

I became what he wanted me to become, during those dark summer nights lying in the dew, with cows grazing so near us their sweet milk smells dominated the night air. Their ceaseless stirrings at human companionship only onticing our own desires, hurrying us on, as if some immediate danger stalked the night, threatening the fulfillment of our rapture, maddening our speed, threatening to interrupt us, to kill our joys long before they had become joys.

Sex with Norman was never peaceful in those times. A turbulence rode over our sanctum like a horseman with a long sword. And, because of this wild menace, this threat of being caught, of being found out, even in that secluded, heavenly place, that nocturnal paradise (oh, God, how I have wished since for such safety, such seclusion) that same fear has always followed me through the years. Not only did Norman change me, but he branded me as well. His turbulence, through his huge body and into mine, formed the nucleous around which my desires would seek their level. I would seek him out in every male, those large, those small, but giant or dwarf, they would have to possess the semblance of the thinghs which were endowed within him, that fire which would burn forever, that roughness of tongue and limb, that painful, everpaining torment of his groins.

Norman robbed me. And his robbery was as cruel as if he had destroyed my God. And the ironic twist of it

all was that Norman, in his masculine desire to fulfill for himself the contents of the wine jar that was my young, ignorant body, fulfilled sobriety for himself, and it was I who became intoxicated, for his mouth on the great wound had sucked out all the elixir and the poison was left. He robbed me, not knowing that there had been anything to rob.

His rough hands on my arms set me tears to flowing, his hard white thighs against my buttocks, pressing my stomach into the sharp blades of summer grass, burying my face into the dark earth, twisting pain until my whole body was in flames. Yet, today I hunger for those pains, would welcome those dark bruises upon my forearms and chest. Would thrill again to his teeth marks upon the back of my neck, for toward the end, I would know that he would smoulder me with warm affection, and would, where his hard knuckless had wrung blood, would soothe with those red lips on his, would calm, with his deeply southern voice, the rapid pacing of my heart. And I would know again, in the slackness of his limbs, the limp arresting of his body closely against mine. The solemness of peace – there encircled by those grazing cows, the lapping of the creek, the dew drenched leaves, the winking stars on that long ago summer.

Yet, I lost him – lost Norman in that single season that was the strangest of all affections. The season which I have always called my twilight of youth – for when Norman was gone, something of my youth went too, the youth without the innocence. Norman took my innocence with him.

In robbing me of my innocence, trifling with the things that would later become to me the most precious things on earth, he opened my eyes to my surroundings. I knew I was different. I was not like other boys. Norman had tapped the deepest recesses of passion within me, and no one, ever, could disturb me nor arouse me except males. Girls withdrew into the dim shadows of my past. Meaningless creatures, existing on the border-line of my world, as alien to me as if they were beings from another planet. They had as yet to provoke the passion within me. To kindle the fires that needed little encouragement to set them aflame. Norman had beat them to it. He formed the blueprint, the plan, the acceleration

of my drives and later my ambition. Had Norman knowingly know these things, and I did not quite realize them then, he would not have felt flattered. He had merely fulfilled an appetite. And strangely, perhaps for the both of us, we saw nothing abonrmal in our practices. In fact fact, our pleasures overran our moral sense of values. We took it for granted. We did not even discuss it. Words were useless to describe such a feeling, and we were both young, and the young abhor conversation or any discussion beneath the surface when the physical speaks lounder than any words. We met, drawn by this strange arch-angel of desire, and drank from love's draught, fulfilling quickly, as an elf eating lilies, sharp toothed and cautious, until our appetites were replenished. And we were drawn again and again into that peaceful alcove near the creek.

I would remember how, after supper, when twilight still dominated the land, I would walk through the field of emerald corn. Then, waist high, down the railroad cut, then across the highway and over the rail fence that bordered his father's farm. He would he there waiting, lying on his back, his hands behind his head, a straw moving back and forth in his mouth. By then, the chimney sweeps would be out, their small bodies darting swiftly about us and with sounds like tearing si1k. We never wasted words. Many times were never talked at all. We merely quickly pulled off our clothes and merged into one another. I will never forget his smell. He had usually bathed before coming down to the creek, and his hair was still damp, and his white skin glowed with a cool freshness, a freshness that would all too soon burn into me. He was considerate, always tender – tender even when the welt of his passion obliterated his reason and his calloused hands stamped bruises upon my back and shoulders. In his wildest passion, wrought in his intense heat to the point of some kind of unworldly madness, he was tender — yet —now I know he was merciless. Then, strung out on his interest in me, flattered that so masculine a frame, so swarthy a being, who was so popular with the girls, preferred me, sought me out, waited for me in the summer twilights, loved me instead of girls, numbed my senses to true reality. He could have raped me and I would have adored the merciless-

ness of his brutality. That I was being needed by someone, that 1 was being sought out, that I was chosen from a long list of school mates I had always considered more popular than I, and of whom I had always been envious, even hated a little, relapsed my moral obligations and surrendered my body – oh, my ignorant country reared body – to his every whim. And I was so ignorant then, in both body and mind, ignorant of being taken advantage of. He was an altar, and I was the sacrifice on that altar.

It was unthinkable that there would come a time when he would no longer want me. I never harbored such thoughts. Not once, during the whole of our relationship, did I think our tryst would end. It was so complete a thing, so dominate a situation in my young life I knew it would go on forever. My pride in that he craved me – pain upon pain – and he could have sharpened that pain to agony had he wished, fortified him to me for life. That he should use me, then cast my body aside like a soiled, broken toy, was unthinkable.

Yet, as I said early in my story, he awakened me to my surroundings and I began to look for in other boys my age, the same things I found in him. The young are adaptable. I discovered Maurice.

If Norman was the angel of light, then Maurice was the angel of darkness. he was Norman's exact opposite: dark of skin, jet black hair, emerald eyes, daring, reckless. He looked like a pirate walking the plank. And, unlike Norman, he was a "smart-alec." He was well built, and knew this profoundly, and used it to his advantage. He wore tight T-shirts, jeans and riding boots tucked under his cuffs. Yet, he never went out for athletics and was usually found in a circle of girls. Too, to complete his corn-pone image, he played the guitar, tried to sing, and composed several corny songs which his father paid for being recorded in New Orleans. Maurice thought he was hot stuff. And he was.

He started off by making fun of me in public, which I didn't mind, and he ended by making love to me in the back seat of his flashy dilapidated convertible. He parked beyond the cinders patched near the railroad depot, with his defenses completely down – even his pants. How pompus he was before the class. How childish he became when, complying so readily with me, he destroyed

what it had taken him sixteen years to build. A whore. of which I knew nothing then, would not have been more willing. He fell hook, line, and sinker. He was so gullable, he lost all of his former charm. In fact, he made the first pass at me. The reason? Norman had told him about me. So he felt taking me was easy. All he had to do was get me in the back seat and pull off his pants. He had none of Norman's ruggedness, nor his tenderness, nor his experience. He was clumsy. He was so clumsy in fact, that he thought that merely because he was a boy and not a girl he was irresistable. That I wanted him simply because he was male, and that whatever efforts other than this he might employ were not needed. His cocksureness made him a deplorable lover. Unlike Norman, he never grew rough. In fact, I believe he was afraid that he was going to hurt me. He kept asking me this question.

If I was callow and ignorant in those days, then Maurice was more so. He was even less experienced with girls. At least, they did attempt to draw me out, even though I never made one move in their direction, and Maurice was constantly maneuvering to make himself an attractive idle in their eyes. He worked at being wanted, despite his suave handsomeness, while I merely existed and was wanted.

Yet, my ignorance again was my undoing. I have often wondered since what I would have been had I been born a woman. Passion was my battleground. Had I been more occupied in the wiles of others and less preoccupied with my immediate popularity, I would have sensed the reason for Norman's confidence in Maurice concerning his relations with me. Norman was jealous, and his jealousy drove him to plant a suitor in my midst as a test to my loyalty to his brutaliy – which to him was deathless love.

What punishment lies ahead for these kind of people does not touch them in this world. They go through life fully clothed, with their shoes, their shawls, and their mittens. They go safely. They master their own environment. What does not touch them does not effect them – What touches them they wreck and destroy.

I found this out one late night when Maurice asked me to drive into Jackson with him to see a movie. After-

wards, when he had parked his car off the dirt road leading from the main highway to my father's house, that road which, when a young child, I thought so end-1ess, so mysterious. A winding trail to those soft, warm supper lamps at the top of the hill. Maurice had gotten out of his car and had come around to my side, his strong bronze arms under mine lifting me to him where he kissed me under the neck. Suddenly, he laughed softly. I felt tricked somehow. A moment more and Norman's roadster swerved into the drive, the brakes squeaking, th lights bloated yellow in the screen of dust.

The rendezvous had been planned.

I was as innocent as a lamb driven to slaughter.

A door banged and Norman rushed around the front of the car, the headlights looming his huge body up in a fanfare of gold. He pushed Maurice to one side, roughly I thought then, but now I know it was in rage, and dragged me from the car. He slapped me full across the mouth. The sound rang in the still gloom

"You damned fairy!" he cried, the whites of his eyes like a jersey bull's when he is pricked with a hay fork.

So that's what I was!

I had never heard that term before. I did not know there was a name for my kind. Then, how did Norman know?

He slapped me again, then dragged me by my shirt collar to his card and shoved me into the front seat. Making an O with his thumb and forefinger, he waved a hand at Maurice, then got into the driver's seat. He sent the car off onto the highway with a guttural roar and sped toward his father's farm. His naked arms were like steel, thrust stiffly toward the steering wheel. He kept his face glued to the road, his blond hair tumbled over his eyes, his lips twisted down in a determined, exaggerated gorge. He breathed as though he had come in last at a steeplechase. There was sweat on hi sfore-head, tiny clear beads which I could see each time car-lights whizzed by.

"You been screwing with that hill billy?" he spat rough-ly, his voice a bit tremulous.

"No," I lied.

"I'm going to give you a screwing you won't forget," he spat back, turning quickly to eye me steadily.

I begged. I pleaded. I sat up close to him. He shoved

me away. Mr head hit the car door on the opposite side.

"I hate queers!" he said in a drowned, muffled voice.

Another new word. The world was getting broader tor me.

"If it's anything I hate worse than queers it's two-timing queers!"

We were at the farm now, and he turned off the road and parked under a clump of elms near the rail fence.

"Get out!" he ordered.

Numbly, I obeyed. I was scared. I had never seen him this mad before. Maybe once. He had gotten into a fist fight with a drawling-voicd tobacco chewing Beggerly boy from Stein's Creek. He had beat this head against the well house at school until the boy's face was red with blood. It has taken six football boys to pull him off.

He half pushed, half shoved me over the rail fence. Twisting my arm behind my back, he forced me through the dewy grass to the edge of the creek where, oh, Go,. have mercy, we had lain so many time that summer. The memory tore through my heart like a raging wind. What was he going to do to me? I went limp at the thought nnnHe tore off my shirt. Then he stripped me, shoes and all, jerking, twisting, wrestling at my arms and legs until I lay naked on the wet grass.

"Please!" I cried. I trembled. My brain whirled like a treadmill.

"Don't you please me," he groaned, animal like, "making it with every hard tail at school, ain't you?"

"Only you," I managed to whisper.

He stripped naked.

Catching me by one arm, he turned me over on my stomach then jerked my other arm from beneath my body. Curdely, he kicked my legs apart. He was on me like a wrestler. His body was wet with sweat. Without one inclination of mercy he began to take me. Suddenly, my body turned to red hot flame, as every nerve in my body snt lightning-like fire – fire hot pain, through and into every inch of my being, even my toes, my fingers. He beat me unmercifully. His hard, field calloused fists, like maulteen hammers, pounded the middle of my hack, my shoulders, my forearms, the back of my head. Beneath the savae groans which poured through the struggle of his passion, he let out guttural curses, each curse word empowering his fists to drive mother blow home.

I had one hope: that through his wrath of passion, turned now to lust and hate, in climaxing would ebb to his old tenderness. Now naive I still was, even beneath this merciless savage, to think of recompense.

I was no longer potter's clay in his milk stained, field worn hands, moulded under the guidance of his love – his love making that to me, with him, had become an art. I was now that broken toy, to be crudely tarnished, then to be thrown aside.

Suddenly, a warmth flowed through the dark places or my body. His limbs grew strangely slack. The sweat dripped in torrents, down his belly and onto and over my thighs. His whole body melted down over mine. The fire hot pain left. A balm, like the flowing oils of sleep, moved over me like a sleepers dream. With sudden trembling hands, he twisted my face around, which was buried in the forth of clover, and kissed me full upon the lips. He drank my lips, my sweaty face cupped in both his hands. He began to stroke my hair. His breath, even during his kiss, rose and fell like a duly tide, and in my trembling mouth I swallowed his breath, his inhales and exhales. He began to cry.

Norman cried.

He took me into his arms, lifting me up, cradling my head against his chest.

"I am sorry! I am sorry!" he kept saying, over and over.

The sound was the sound of angels in my ears.

All was forgiven.

The night wind, borne upon a range of dark rain clouds, sighed through the near by pines, lifting their limbs recklessly, as the boles bore on bole, wounding each other each time they swayed. The tall grass along the banks if the creek waved to and fro, like the plumed heads of drunken goddesses. And the naked limbs of the dead trees whose roots sucked up the muddy water in th creek, lowered and scrapped the surface, like reapers in an open field. Drops of rain fell through the night.

Heaven was in tears.

We dressed slowly, then he drove me home. He left me at the turn off leading to my house.

As I opened the car door he caught hold of my hand. His own hand was soft, warm, completely transformed from the hard hammers but so short a while ago. His

voice trembled like a ghost's.

"Don't – tell anyone – ever."

I nodded to him out of the darkness.

Pain, and the memory of pain, is not pain when it is borne out of the oval wound of love.

Yet – I knew I had lost him.

Tomorrow – tomorrow in the light of day he would be a stranger. How I knew this I did not know. I had lost Maurice too.

I walked home in the rain.

The next morning I was a fright. My arms and back were blue. My father examined my disheveled clothes. l told him I had been in a car wreck. Oddly, he believed me. He was never hard on us. His own boyhood had been rough and tumble, and he expected it of his own children. But my mother took a long-sided view of the matter. Like all women with their off-spring, love must have its reward.

"You have been in a fight," she said, a look of disappointment on her trusting face. "Why? You are not that kind."

I refused to answer her. Norman's and my secret would go with me to my grave. I never thought of the disgrace, the shame, the guilt for myself, should my family know of our relation. I only thought to keep what he and I had together. Nothing else was important. Not that I was basically ruinous. I had scruples. I had ambitions for myself. I did want to be admired, respected. I was too young to know then of that kind of respect that is within yourself, the respect of self. But my relations with Norman at the time seemed a thing so natural, so in place with my emotions and my dreams it hardly needed comment. Today, I could no more go back to that small southern town and indulge in a relation similar to my relation with Norman, any more than I could return to do a murder. For knowing that town now, after years away from it, realizing its type of people, their strong wills, their determined obstinancy to hang onto respectability, they would have tarred and feathered me and ran me out on a rail. What I had done was a crime – shameful, degrading, unthinkable! How reckless, now thoughtless, I must have been then, skirting their crude laws, playing with my own life, my own future. Not going into the teeth of the wind but doubling back into it.

Like a fox with hounds, I was making of my future a plaything, sure of my confidence in a people I would never fully understand – nor accept.

As on that early morning on returning home, bruised and in rags, I never stopped to think of the consequences of my own undoing. My desires were so strong, they counciled out all the rules.

My two older brothers kidded me about the bruises. They attempted, in their older, more experience knowledge, to advise me on future bouts, showing me various standing positions, the angle of my arms, my fists thrust up as guards. I accepted their advice half heartedly. But my kid brother, who loved me almost to the point of adoation, became enraged to tears. He wanted to tight back, to help me win this battle, to avenge these tormentors who had toppeled his silver God.

How ironic. Had all three of them known the truth they their out rage except the sight of blood on Norman's face. thei rout rage except the sight of blood on Normans face. Murder would have been in their hearts, and if not murder, bruised and broken bones, for they were possessed with hair trigger tempers. The same kind of tempers which had caused our forefathers to lose their necks, and to put their native countries behind them betwen the hours of midnight and dawn.

I had to remain in bed for three days, and during that time my body, from the waist down stiffened. From my rectum to my naval, deep with me, pains like I have never known shot upwards, as if I was being probed with red, hot, branding irons. I was scared. I refused seeing a doctor, fearful of what he would discover about me. Fearfll that he might examine me all over and out of the situation, twist the truth into something else. So I suffered alone. Silenly, I wished I was dead. But the alive liveon, and the following Monday I went back to school.

Norman refused to look at me. Whenever I saw him on the campus, he was always surrounded by girls and his football buddies, usually, under the rose arbour in front of the white washed stucco high school dormitory, or at the concrete circle where the water fountains bubbled continuously. Whenever he did see me, he would automatically turn his head, directing his attention to the nearest person standing next to him. He would laugh then, exaggerating his joy, and his cornflower eyes be-

came bluer to me, his blond, curly head more blonde. This reckless air dragged through my heart like claws. Every nerve in my body was set to livid flames. I could not cry. This was a calamity too deep for tears. I knew Norman avoided me, and perhaps I avoided him, taking wide detours around the alcoves and places he habitated, at times going the full school day without getting a drink of water at the fountains in fear of bumping into him. Yet, for the first time since I had known him, I want to talk to him, to probe out with words, what I had failed in him with my body. For the first time words became necessary. I had to know if he cared. Somehow, that had never mattered before, only that he was with me. His physical presence reached across the campus to me and I could think of nothing else. I tried to seek him out then, bold now by my impatience, mad for speed, mad for understanding, mad for his face near mine, the sound of his voice – the sight of that twinkling light in those eyes of him. And how drowsy his voice could be when it was primed on passion, liquid of vowels, drawling out emphasize.

One day, I met him along the darkness of the stairs leading up to the auditorium. He was dressed in a baby blue t-shirt and white slacks, which set his eyes off to perfection. His blond hair was like a golden helmet. We paused and looked at each other. Never was he more handsome than on this moment, the dark walls framing him in an aura of gloom, as if he was not actually there, really, but only a figment of my wild imagination. Had he been dressed in rags, with his hair disheveled, he would have still been the shining knight to me.

The stillness was like thunder.

His physical nearness reached out and touched me. I could feel his fine warmth, his breath, the glory that would always be Norman, though he stood three steps below me.

His eyes burned into mine and I know I looked at him like a hungry cat, desperate to devour him. In his eyes, I saw his male desires and in those desires he was fighting me, fighting what we had been to each other. They were the saddest eyes I was ever to see.

"Oh, Norman," I cried, clinging to the stair rail, my face bent toward his. "Are you really leaving for the army? I heard someone –."

"Tomorrow night at eight," he answered, interrupting

me.

I began to tremble like a thief. Since the news had spread around, and the numerous rumors broadcast over the radio of the Germans and a war, I was desperate to learn if what I had heard was the truth. Many of the boys at school were quitting and joining different branches of the service. For days, even weeks, Norman's name had been mentioned whenever conversations had come around to the war, and that was frequent.

"Can I go with you to the station?" I blurted out, incoherent to anything except my wild crave to be with him, to feel his touch, to have his body next to mine — despite the pain! Thank God, agony has ending.

He looked at me for a kind moment, then dropped his eyes.

"I hate farewells," he said.

He rushed up the stairs.

That next night, I stood in the downpour of rain along the opposite rails of the depot and watched as he and his girl waited for the train. He seemed ill at ease, reluctant to move, while she, ruddy of face and bitchy, stared up at him with her huge cow's eyes and clung to his arm like a tendril of poison ivy. I hated her. Norman could have done better. He could have had any girl at Florence High. He looked down at her sadly, and she was all attention, hanging on his every word – words which were meant for me, which were meant to be looking into mine.

Afterwards, when he had boarded the train and it had snaked its way north through the wet night, I went back to his father's farm and sprawling upon the ground, lay my face against the warm grass where he and I had lain so many times during that long lost summer. I could almost smell the scent of his body in the soft turf, could hear his breathing. And I swore – and I was too young. too callow to swear such things – that never again in my life would I seek his counterpart. And to this day, I have kept this promise to myself. I turned to males who were dark, who were black of hair, who never had blue eyes but black, or green, or hazel. Who were never huge in stature like Norman. Rather small, petite, miniatures of that world I had left behind. It was my wrath against Norman, or rather against myself, my own natural de-

sires, beyond my own physical nature. For I robbed myself of what I truly wanted in engulfing my body with males who must, and who must always, employ themselves as Norman's opposite.

This was my rebellion, my battle to keep myself immune from anyone or anything who might take on the slightest resemblance to Norman, though he had set a pattern, had created a symbol, had become the epitome of everything I would ever crave in another.

The turbulence of Norman's thoughtless love had left an afterglow. In my rebellion against his handsomeness, his recklessness, his prism of pain, during all the days which followed in my life, I would come to torture myself in denying myself his facsimile, and I would come to glow to others, to beguile others, to mystify others, in that from the rememberance of Norman, I would glow from within.

Norman spoiled me for everyone else. Like Hercules, who, bringing the God Paris up from the underworld to see the sunlight for the first time, spoiled Paris for the darkness he once had loved. That Paris would forever seek sunlight, is apparent, as I, spoiled for Norman, would seek out those levels which had given me joys. Like Paris, I would take darkness instead, realizing there was and never could be a substitute for sunlight.

Looking back on those times, fitting the broken pieces of my life together, 1 readily understand why I have grown to love small, dark haired youths. For the night Norman left in the rain, and it was the last time I ever saw him, my desires became a centered fixation. Like a sheppard driving out wolves, I drove the image of Norman out of my brain, cutting away like a sharp knife, his image each time I lay beneath some dark, brutal, and many times savage youth piercing me with his instrument of hot pain.

I became all their spoils, not caring, to be soiled again and again, only to be soiled by mother. When they were through with me, I was as nothing to them, tossed aside, forgotten. I let them use me and felt no worse by that use. In fact, I felt triumphant. I was getting back at Norman. The more painful my lovers were, the more brutal, the more careless, happier if they showed no mercy, the more I was denying Norman. So secure I

was in my thoughts, my rebellion on life, that if they had raped me, as Norman did the first time he had me, I was sure he would have winched on the battlefield. Every time they probed my inner body, I was certain he had nightmares in his sleep.

What sweet revenge! To be screwed while your lover is miserable. To feel pain, to cry out from that pain when the pain reaches and gorges out every nerve, when every muscle is quivering with fire, when there is a shuddering in the deep recesses of you and you know a quicker pain will follow.

CHAPTER ONE

Drugged on rebellion, I went back to Maurice. Rather, he came to me, though in a round about way. I knew I had lost him, that kind of loss which is never really possessed, a momentary possession, a short interlude of having, then losing, then having again – and never havnig really.

Our paths crossed one afternoon, directly after a football game. He walked along beside me, his hands thrust in his tight pants pockets, his shoulders slightly forward, that know-it-all grin on his face, and his eyes casting lying, masquarading glances.

"Let's go to a show tonight, Hot's," he said. He always referred to me with that nickname.

"Go to hell," I said flatly. I kept on walking.

"Oh, come on," he insisted, his pose unruffled. "I got a hard on." I gave him a sarcastic glance.

"What's the matter. Can't get a girl?"

He looked abashed.

"You're better – better than any girl."

"I don't screw," I said, baiting him. I was thinking of Norman. He laughed, his black, curly, head cocked at an angle.

"That's not the way I hear it, baby!"

"Not you anyway," I said hurtingly.

He elbowed me in the ribs.

"What you afraid of, Hot's, afraid I'll hurt you?"

I stopped walking.

"No," I came back tartly.

The crowds pushed around us. He leaned closer, his lips close to my ear.

"Come on, babe, I'll go easy, really I will. You won't feel a thing."

I raised an eyebrow.

"How could you hurt me, with what you've got."

He coughed.

"I'll give you this, if you will," he murmured, his voice trembling. He took off his watch and handed it to me.

Reluctantly, I took the watch.

"What do you think I am?" I asked, somewhat puzzled.

"A swell guy," he answered, then added. "And a nice piece –" He pinched me on the buttocks. Then he winked.

Cock-sure bastard!

Yet, his devil may care expressions, his freeer than air attitude, the swarthy manner about him, even in his immature stage of life, beguiled me on. He was like a Faun dancing to Pan's music.

He patted me on the hand and then disappeared through the crowd.

That night he screwed me. Not in the back seat of his convertible as the first time, but on a pallet he had thought to bring with him, stretching it out on the sand on the inward cline of Pearl River. When he was through, he rolled over on his back and lit a cigarette. I turned over and gazed at the stars. Whenever he inhaled, the light of the cigarette illuminated his nakd body, as does the light of the moon when, coming from out of a range of clouds, spreads its ghostly glow over the fields, the dappling water, the luminous trees.

That same light bathed the full length his body, briefly, momentarily, yet long enough for me to glimpse the dark patch of hair between his legs, his smooth flat stomach, the round swell of his chest muscles as he breathed, and the nipples, dark and gorgeously round and firm, like tiny apple blossoms folded over brown leaves.

His hand slid across the pallet and followed my arm down its length, then slid warmly into my hand. I did not resist.

'Sure as hell glad Norman's gone," he said, almost in a whisper.

I remained silent. He gripped my hand harder.

"Got you all to myself now."

He turned on his side and looked at me. He flipped his cigarette but into the river and lay his other hand on top of mine and his. He caressed my hand, rubbing his fingers up and down mine, gripping, then loosening, then caressing again.

Somewhere below, the water trinkled over a stone, its constant ripple making a musical sound, hollow, haunting. A whippo or will far off, gave out its mating cry, its echo coming from the dark wall of woods. A breeze stirred like whispering women. Maurice coughed. He leaned over me and kissed me, his oily black hair falling into my eyes. He let one hand slip down my body and he patted me on the ass.

His mouth found mine again, this time open, his full lips warm, wet, searching. He swallowed my world.

His face buried in my chest. He kissed my nipples. Gradually, his face slid down my chest, his open lips sliding back and forth like a snail. Then he kissed my naval. I could hear the sound of his breathing. The lower he went the harder, the louder the sound. His hand went around my legs, along my thighs. His face eased slowly down-down.

"Nuts!" he said in a trembling voice. He got up. "Let's go home."

I obeyed. We dressed silently. He would not look in my direction. The sound of his zipper in his jeans tore through the night. He spread his legs vaguely apart and, with a masculine gesture, jerked upwards on his jeans, then adjusted the material around his crotch, masquerading the gesture, as though he was so large he had difficulty dressing. I had witnessed that gesture before. It was as much an art with males, especially young males, as it was with females adjusting their hose, or patting their corsets. It called attention to that area of their bodies they sought to gain admiration. Maurice's crotch was as much a part of his beauty as breasts were to a girl. And during those times, a greater emphasis was played on the crotch than anytime since I believe, for the fashion of the day was tight pants but no under garments. High school boys were careful that they were exposed to best advantage. In that year 1936, the age of censoring had yet to begin, and movies and magazines and advertisements of every nature exaggerated maleness and underscored nudity. Sex was not rampant, as it is today, and the young were ever conscious of their organs. Swimming in the nude was not a rarity. Photos of nudes could be purchased wihout question, and even comic strips emphasized he glory of the male, highlighting the male features in skimpy space suits, Tarzan G-strings, and fish scale outfits which hugged the loins and embossed the crotch sling.

Maurice drove me home in mute silence, the top of his car down, his black hair blowing in the night wind. His lips pursed over a half lit cigarette which he carelessly kept bubbling at the corner of his mouth.

"I can't see you no more," he said dryly, as he stopped

the car and let me out at the lane leading home.

"Why not?" I asked slowly, though I really not care. He was a childish buffon compared to Norman.

"Don't ask questions," he said, shrugging his shoulders. He fumbled in his shirt pockets, lit another cigarette. He seemed ill at ease, undecided. "I like girls," he added sharply.

I turned to go.

"Very well," I said icily, "there are plenty of boys, and they've all got what you have." It was hateful of me to say this. And I was really not gaming him.

That did it.

He cut off the switch and came around the car. I was at the gate by now which opened onto my father's prop- my A huge metal gate with wrought iron lace work af- fronting it, and flanked by two huge concrete pillars. I was bending to open the gate. He struck me squarely be- tween my shoulder blades with the butt of his fist. The air left my lungs. I straightened up. I pretended that it had not hurt.

"Don't get smart with me," he uttered gruffly, still keeping the lighted cigarette bewteen tight pursed lips. "I'll beat the hhell outa you, the make you besides – get that."

I nodded. My back was still turned to him. He was so close I could feel his hot breath on the nap of my neck. His thighs were pressed against my legs.

"You'll see me when I say you'll see me, and I'll have you when I want to have you – understand. And don't you get no fancy ideas about them other guys at school. Ain't nobody gonna have you until I get through with you – nobody. I ain't sharing my tail with no one. Now – pull down your pants."

I obeyed, still not looking back at him. He slipped his off and began to take me standing up. He wound his arms under my arm pits then up and over the back of my head. At each thrust he would press harder with his hands, pulling my head further down. I gripped the fence for support. Tears smarted my eyes. Not from pain. I was used to pain. But from humiliation. Maurice, in his awk-wardness, so unlike Norman, though like Norman in what he was doing, was trying to hurt and degrade me in as coarse a manner as he could. Then, knowing so little actually about life, and less about people, I had no solu-

tion for his actions, but now, looking back at that callow time, that meaningless night, I realize that he was brutal simply because he wanted me to think him tough, all male, and not as he had been on the pallet on the banks of Pearl River earlier. Like my rebellion against Norman, so did Maurice have his rebellion against me – and all my kind – I would learn much later. Outwardly he wanted girls, to be a paramour, but deep within him the hidden smouldered desires demanded that he seek out his own sex.

When he was through, and I did not even realize he was through, as I always had with Norman, his legs grew limp and he kissed me softly on the nap of the neck.

"I'll see you, Hot's," he murmured quickly, pulling up his pants. He got in the car and drove off. I put back on my jeans and stood watching his car until the light of the headlight faintly vanished down the long straight stretch of highway forty-nine, the sound of the muffler dying sound – like something dying – some live thing crying its last breath.

I took my own time walking up the moonlit hill to home. The dark trees on each side of me loomed up threateningly, like giants ready to spring. and the night winds carried on its breath the long streamers of moss which hung from the limbs directly overhead. Their gray vespers sweeping my tired, bewildered face like ghosts. My father's horses, idling the night away on the other side of the rail fence, saw me and bounded off across the pasture, their hoof beats on the neatly mown grass like drums in a pagan ritual.

I wanted to think. A n adult emotion was being borne within me. I wondered that, if Norman and Maurice loved so much their encounters with me, then what about the other boys our age at school. Did they have love partners? When they laughed and talked to one another after class, romped, kidded, played, wrestled together – did they draw away at night to some secluded place as Norman and I had done, as Maurice and I were doing, and indluge in one another's body?

Sex, and the discussion of sex, had never held an interest for me – until Norman had tapped the ultimate in passion within my young body. Even my

knowledge of sex with girls had been sketchy. Mainly because they did not interest me. I considered sex and girls and marriage and children all would come later in that far flung time of the future, when teen age joys were over and done, when school was completed, when I would be grown up and mature, as my father or my older brother. That Norman and Maurice should effect my whole life never occurred to me at the moment – not that night as I walked up the little dusty lane to home. These things were mere interludes, a part of growing up, secrets that brought inner joys because they were secrets. That males, their habits, their builds, their sex diversions, should alter my course into the future, that they would dominate my ever principle, my every creed, was of little consequence now. I was not even curious. In fact, my one curiosity lay in the alternating imagination of what other boys were doing with one another – f they were doing what Norman and I had done, and if so, was it a part of the male truth to nature.

I was dumb about sex I knew, and I was dumber still about people, especially people about which I came in contact, those who were the most intimate, for their closeness, somehow, blocked out my observing them as they really were. I condoned to their wishes, their desires, and having fulfilled those desires, considered this enough. I never possessed the forthought at the time to pursue an abstraction, to grow wary that my involvements with them were abnormal – and if abnormal – was I a rarity among them.

In the future at school I began to watch other boys, watched boys with other boys, what they did when in the public eye, what they said to one another, if they touched, if one signaled the other out in conversations, if two boys dominated the others presence. I became a detective in my little game, watching them like a cat at a mouse hole, an dstoring my small bits of information in the storehouse of my mind, later to make use of them if necessary.

Too, I began to notice other boys physical builds. I had always admired the human form, in fact, worshipped it, for I was possessed with natural artistic talent and, though I had never had any formal training in art – and Florence High carried on subjects beyond math, history, literature and Latin. I could draw and

paint exceptionally well, especially the human form. Up til the present time, before Norman had broken me in on sex, I viewed the male form as I would have viewed a stone statue. I saw its beauty, felt something of amour, something of expression within myself, some inner emotion when I looked at it, but that was all. Passion was a dorman thing. Art was art for the sake of art.

But now, at sixteen, the male body excited me. The lift of an arm, the play of a thigh, the nap of a neck, the athletic strides, the movements of the buttocks as one walked. The swell and relaxing of sinews as they ran, jumped, played, sent strange thrills through me. They were marble statues suddenly turned to life – forms of beauty surpassing everything I had ever beheld or dreamed.

To watch them on the field, on the courts, under the showers, engulfed me with a hunger that was never filld. They were like a gorgeous sunset, and the eyes scan up and down, grasping, searching, drinking to the draught with each gaze, fearful that it will vanish forever.

CHAPTER 3

There was Luther.

Never before, nor since, and even to this day, I have never seen a male which has effected me so much. To say one is perfect sounds corny, even in those late thirties, but Luther was perfect, as a work of art is perfect, so it appears, or a statue caught up in an evenings flames.

He was short in height, too short actually to be a basketball star, in which he excelled. The proportion of his bone structure, the smooth bronze of his heavy muscles, the thick thigh and calf sinews, the strong arms, rounded but superhumanly strong, made him in my eyes a God. His hair was short, chestnut brown, and tipped with gold by the sun, but his features were basically brunette, so he was my perfect rebellion against Norman. He was neither blond like him nor negroid dark like Maurice, so I had in Luther a combination of both.

No God stepping down from Mount Olympia to walk among mortals could have touched such magic as did Luther in my tender – all too naive heart. I would watch him on the basketball court, drinking in every change of his form, missing nothing about him as he leaped and pivoted, his maroon and white ball uniform a decorous note against his sun bronzed skin. Skin that boasted on his forearms and thighs a covering of thick wiry hair that shone like golden threads in the warm summer's sun. I thought he looked like Ben-Hur standing in the thining chariot, his sweaty limbs flashing, his white silken tunic blowing daringly across his embossed groin.

How the memory holds to some things and lets others go. Even today, even as I pen these words, years and and years vanished, or vanquished I should say. I can still see Luther strolling at that easy panther's gait across that outdoor basketball court as clearly as though it were only yesterday. His image burns bright on my memory where others, even those of kin, and those I grew to love profoundly, have dimmed to dull demolished images I cannot recall nor fathom. He is as bright in my eyes and in my mind as if he stood before me engraved on a metal shield. Time nor tide nor happiness nor heartbreak can take that image from me.

Admiring him, and I will always admire him. I became recklessly brave – dangerously daring. I began to notice my physical appearance more. I kept my dark hair smoothly combed at all times, wore flattering colored sport shirts, tight jeans with a wide belt. My black riding boots, which were the fashion, always polished to mirror brightness, and tapped on the heels so that my strides, and I was proud of my walk, could be heard as I approached and departed. I sought glamour, male glamour, truly the natural instinct of the male, to plume my feathers thinly so that they sparkled in the light. To preen the jewels of my young beauty as a woman preens the jewels on her gown. I wanted to be noticed – by Luther.

To be brash, to display an attraction considered cheap, was not in me. I never could and I never will. I would meet men on their level, not mine, the level of a true male, so this was my weapon with Luther. It has always been my weapon, if I ever had a subterfuse, to be as a man among men. I have always found, on those times much later in my life, that they that they liked me best this way, respected me, considered me one of them. Men have always liked and admired me, those who have known, and those who have not. My own desires have presented no barrier between them and our relationship.

I instinctively knew that it I was ever to gain Luther's attention I would have to employ myself upon the plateau of his, and not my, conscience. My desperation to know him better, for him to like me in return, heightened my courage, lent me needed patience. He was no Norman, and certainly not a Maurice.

My sixteen years had been kind to me. I had blossomed out to full maturity. Physical work in the fields, track, swimming and various other outdoor activities, including much horseback riding, gave to me a masculine charm. My tanned skin glowed (I never had pimples like the other boys) and I was profoundly masculine, with none of the gestures, thank God, of those I would come to know later in that lavender world of anarchy. I was myself, for I was supremely myself. And I was aware of a certain attraction I had, a certain glow that left its trail and I was always remembered.

That I was different in any way was unthinkable. I was as healthy as any of the other boys at school, was mature, even more so than some of them in the tweleth grade, could shoot as straight as any, could outdo a number of them in sports, and could ride better than any of them. I had been reared among horses. The saddle came natural. My disposition was likeable, though there were discords in my personality. I abhored falseness. I could not beguile. I could not mask over charm and use a sense of wit I did not feel. I was as straight forward as an Indian.

I went out for basketball. Not that I particularly liked the game. I did not. My aim was Luther. I would have signed up as a fork carrier in hell just to be near him. Actually, I was no good at the game, but I was good enough to remain on the team, though that was second string, which kept me from going to the showers the same time as did Luther. This infuriated me, but I was determined. I singled him out in time and asked him questions about the game, insisted that he give me pointers. He did willingly, innocent of the ambitions which burned inside me, and thinking only that he was helping a less fortunate team mate. He was overly kind and considerate. His voice was soft, but firm, and the tender expressions that would come over his face when he thought he had your interest melted me completely. I would become so absorbed in watching his features, he could have switched his conversation from basketball to rocketry to the moon and I would never known the change. How lavender his eyes turned when they were trapped in the bright light of outdoors, their pupils flecked with bits of hazel. How deep red were his lips, almost purple, whenever he was in a lather from too much practice and his face flushed from the heat. How his hair shone, like a cap of burnished bronze, when it was damp with sweat, and the ringlets down over his smooth forehead like garlands of satin. Yet, even during those high tides of emotion, of complete exhaustion, he was calm, his drawling voice going over me like warm oil, his manner so introxicating he was exasperating.

He was the God on marble – my cavalier of the southland on the white horse of dreams. Truly, he was the only dream I have ever had that did not die in the

face of reality. And I loved the south only a little less than I did my father's farm and home, reading all the romantic novels I could lay my hands on, propelled by the heroes and heroines, the civil war, the chivalry, the heartache, the despair, and here this handsome boy stood, as romantic as any of the swashbuckling heroes I had ever read about or dreamed. As dashing as any cavalier, as brave and as kind and loyal as any confererate soldier.

His image stalked my day light hours and infiltrated my dreams at night. He was ever constant. I imagined him doing what Norman did to me, actually felt him beside him, could even hear his breathing. He tormented me with an ecstasy that knew no bounds. He took the whole of my young inexperienced life and turned it to sweetness. The very sight of him smiling down at me was maddening. His mere touch would have been profound rapture. Yet, he was no more to me than a story book love, a magical unreal lover, for he had never touched, nor said, nor sought me in any way save in a kindly outpouring of friendliness. That he would ever probe my passions with his own, I never doubted. That was in the future. I was having too much fun at the moment lo counterbalance my fears of someday not having him and wreck my present happiness. School automatically became some kind of belated heaven. I could hardly wait til morning so that I could catch the bus which would speed me over those rough dusty roads to him, and I always fell back sick hearted when three o'clock came and those buses would disperse again, taking him south from Florence and away from me for one more, tiresome, dreadful, meaningless night.

At the end of the season the school gave its annual dance. Naturally, all the athletes would be present, and with their girls. I took Myrna Brenson, or rather, she came in a carload of other girls, as was common during those days. Their escorts awaiting their arrival on the front steps of the auditorium. There were few cars available in those conservative times and any automobile coming in the direction of the school loaded itself with young passengers.

Maurice brought me in his convertible, and with his lips stuck out an inch beyond his nose because I had a

date and would be late for him to pick me up. He had refused to attend the dance.

And I knew why. All the athletes would he there and, because he was not athletic himself, having never gone out for any of the school sports, he was naturally self conscious about it. Too, he was jealous. He did not want me to be with anyone, not even girls.

When he had turned in at the gravel drive and parked his car in front of the auditorioum, I turned to him with a confidence bordering on egotism.

"You will pick me up after the dance?" I asked kindly. too kindly, for I knew he was mad and that madness gave me a certain superiority that made me alive, intoxicating.

"I might and I might not," he answered directly, his voice snappy and surpressed between clenched teeth. He did not look at me, but keep his face turned toward the front of the car, as if he preoccupied himself watching the gathering crowd milling around the ceiling lights of the building entrance. "I just might get me a girl and screw her."

He laughed sarcastically.

I was too anxious over plotting my course with Luther to do battle with his emotions.

"Good," I said hatefully, smiling back. "I want you to have a good time."

"Bitch!" he cried hoarsely. He rammed his fist against the dashboard. He withdrew it reluctently and lay it along the curve of the stearing wheel. His knuckles dripped blood. He drew nervously on his cigarette. There was tension in the air between us. I got out of the car and went to the group of students who were entering the auditorioum.

Maurice wheeled his car out of the drive, shot forward like a rocket, missed the little gutter at the mam street, spun his tires for a moment in the loose gravel, then plowed down the main thoroughfare like a bat out hell. He went over the railroad tracks with a bounce, leaving a long vapor of blue smoke behind him, and swerved in a wide circle in order to gain highway forty nine leading northward.

I laughed triumphantly, goaded on by his anger.

I did not dislike Maurice nor did I really care for him. Rather, at times, I felt an odd sensation of pity for him.

Our sexual relations were carried out automatically and without feeling on my part, immune somehow to his passions, his inexperienced clumsiness, his terrible ego I would never be able to abhor. We were like some husbands and wives, as I would learn later, carrying out and going through sex rituals with the wife, as I, accepting the husband as a matter of course, pleasing him without pleasing myself. For that matter, and this has been true through the duration of my life, I have never said no to any males call. If he wanted me, he had but to signify (and I would learn this later too), by eye, by gesture, or by his physical approach (this I liked better) and I would comply to his whims. That I was sluggish by nature – no – never. I was not, as one man had called me years later, a whore. By nature, with sex as well as with anything else, I tried to be kind to others, to help them if I could, and I did not limit my generosity with sex. It a boy my own age, sometimes older, wanted to lay with me, to have sex with me, to make love to me, and he derived pleasure from that indulgence, and I found something of solace in the union – that what the harm? Our bodies, and I am speaking years ahead of myself, were meant to be excited by other bodies, whether of the same sex or the opposite sex. This was natures law, not man's. So, if man himself plied foolish rules, then he robbed no one except himself.

I did not live for the pleasures of other males. I had my own aspirations in life, and strove toward those goals, but while I climbed that gradual, treacherous road upwards to success, I saw no crime in the knowledge that I brought pleasures and – yes – even rapture to others. It is a selfish person who, through his own quest for sex pleasures, demands only pleasure for himself. That man will have lived out the regime of his life and will never have lived really, for he will have never known the ripe fulfillment of giving his body and his heart to someone else.

Men, and boys, during that time when I was a boy, would seek out my body in fulfilling their own, and returning pleasure for pleasure did not make me less of a man. I have often believed when I was much, much older, that it made me a better man, for through my contacts with the male, understood him profoundly,

and in understanding him I truly understood myself.

The auditorioum within was ablaze with lights and the colored banners and garlands and confetti transformed the dull walls into a picture post card of festivity. Numerous tables were placed in horse shoe fashion, end on end and were covered with immaculate white linen and piled with food and drinks and sparkling silver. I sat near the end of the horse shoe with Myrna Brenson to my left, sat that way purposely, for diagonal from me across the table sat Luther with a girl named Cecile Lassette. A dark, French girl, who had moved from Tallulah, Louisiana that past semester.

From my advantageous position, I could talk to Myrna and at the same time take side long glances at Luther and his degree of interest in the Louisianian. We were all dressed in maroon sport coats and white slacks, the school, colors, and wore white shoes and black bow ties. And Luther, seated beyond a center piece of enormous pomp-poms, with their burnt golds and ambers, and his maroon coat deepening his bronze skin, his chestnut hair faintly lit from the overhead cast, looked, and was to me, the epitome of sex. Never had I seen him more healthy nor handsome. The drop of his head, the dark shadows down the front of his deep wine coat, the sprinkling of gold on his hair, his drowsy lavender eyes, his occasional grins, displaying sparkling white teeth, took by breath, engulfed me in the realm of beauty. And it was all I could do to keep my attention on Myrna. His image kept dragging my eyes to his, his recklessness, and there is a recklessness about those seemingly tame, calm, tingled my every nerve.

That night, borne in upon me, was this new stirring, this new awakening. Luther's strong personality was reaching out across that table and it was dragging me to him, like a magnet that draws iron, like a moth blindingly helpless in a bright bowl of amber. He was uprooting something within my young body, my blood, even the clarity of my perception, which had always been double edged sharp. I did not realize it then, but every concept of his nature, particularly his masculine nature, was stronger, more self imposed than mine and, like on May day when one group of boys tugged at the end of a rope with another group on the other, he was

tugging at my most cherished reserves. Strangely, I was in love with him. Why this should be, I could not fathom. Unlike Norman, nor Maurice, he had never so much as put a hand on my arm, had never eased me, nor tussled with me. A somewhat remove courtesy and: a natural kindness was all that I had ever received from him. Yet, to merely glance at him from across the table, a lump would rise to my throat and I would tremble as though I had been caught in some unspeakable crime.

If it was utterly possible that he never gave me a second thought, nor a second glance, I never acknowledged such a defeat in my mind and in my conscience. My feelings for him were so strong, so self-willed, I knew that it must make itself know to him. Surely he sensed something in the way I gazed at him, in the way he completely held my interest when I was fortunate enough to engage him in a conversation. Sureley he could hear the rapid, unreasoning, pounding of my heart.

How I would manuever him away from Cecile, I did not have the slightest idea. I had made no definite plan of action. My brain could not have prefixed such a transaction. I was of the physical, and relied on my natural instincts to take advantage of the opportunity once and if it presented itself. So I turned my attention to Myrna momentarily, for, after all, as long as I could see him sitting harmlessly across the table there wa not much to worry about nor anything I could do. I could not get up from where I was sitting, go around to him, and say point blank, “Luther, let’s go to bed. Although that would have been the simplest thing to do, but knowing myself utterly, or thinking I did at that age, Luther, and any another male, must come to me first.

I liked Myrna. Of all the girls I have ever known she will stand out in my memory, mainly so, I suppose, because she was a little masculine. She was dark of skin, extremely healthy, with chestnut hair like Luther’s, its shiny strands, which she combed religiously, turned under at the ends and was emblazoned with bangs. To this day, I have always admired women with page boy hair, have always endowed women with that hair style

in my paintings, and have written them into my novels and short stories. That year, Joan of Arc was the feminine ideal, due partly because Hollywood was filming her life story, and every girl from ten to twenty was copying her style.

On looking back at Myrna, I have often wondered whatever happened to her, and that if she, like me, and I am sure she has, took that dark road down into those lavender alleyways. I have known many Lesbians since maturity, and Myrna had their characteristics. She seemed to understand me more than any of the other high school girls, and perhaps, blind and unknown to us then, we were both seeking the same things, probing for something, we as yet did not understand. Now, looking back on those fresh, delightful, intoxicating years, those years of innocence and purity and happiness – young happiness which is known that once and will never be known again.

I know profoundly, and I will swear on this, that people like me, of my kind, know each other. There is an inner knowledge within us, a sense, perhaps an eighth or ninth sense, which advertises one to the other, which gives one away in the giving away of the other. We can recognize, without touch, without speech, without signs nor symbols, our own kind, in this modern day society which bore us yet has exiled us on the dim borders of its existence. That we have been denied the life of the so called normal being, nature, in its ever present struggle to create perfection, has endowed us with a mental radar system with which we can place a fix on our counterparts. Were we born without eyes, nor ears, nor speech, nature has provided us with an invisible thread with which we embroider the tapestries of our exiled, deniable world.

As Myrna and l, even that night at the banquet table, felt this strange, glorious inner current, these invisible wires which laced us strangely, and always strangely together.

Honorary trophies were presented by the coach and, when Luther rose and went up to the head of the table to receive his for being the best all around athlete of the year, I applauded until my palms were red. So overwhelmed by his success, and he deserved it and more, I even stood up and let out a rebel yell, which

turned Luther's head and he smiled at me in such a way that my knees went limp.

Standing there with the shining trophy in his hands, to me he looked like Richard the Lion Hearted, holding that glorious red and white banner, that familiar, deeply romantic symbol of the religious crusade. In fact, no hero out of novel nor history could have attained, in that one stalwart gesture, the supreme prominence he attached as he accepted the trophy and reached out manly to shake the coach's hands.

Later, after meals were eaten, Christine Lowe came out from behind the curtains of the stage and did a dance. She had taken lessons at the McNair dancing academy in Jackson, and was more than a novice at her trade. She was dressed in a Salome costume, of multi-colored flowing veils, her long golden head in wild rythmns as she swayed between the horse shoe tables. All the boys yelled and whistled and some of them shouted: "Take it off!" until they were hoarse. Until the huge, high ceilinged hall shook with vibrations, and the sound of the piano and drums were drowned out in ovation after ovation.

She came round near our table and I saw Luther turn in his chair to watch her. He was facing me, with her back between me and him, her body pivoting and swaying as she danced, it appeared, momentarily just for him, and the light of the ceiling lamps shone in his eyes. That look, that burning, hungry look, that seething look of lust, of desire, hyptonized him for a moment – a moment of some kind of physical, primeval madness. That look of hungry sex, of naked, carnal want, set the light of his eyes to a strange, intoxicating flame. I had never seen that look in his eyes before, nor anyone's for that matter, but I instantly understood what it presaged. He wanted sex with her, wanted it so desperately it glowed through his loins, up through his abdomen, through his burning eyes. His whole body advertised that desire, screamed it. He was like a panther, poised, cautious, waiting, hoping for that instant when he could spring upon his prey. Between them, in that breath of air between their two bodies, something electric, something vital, quivered on invisible wires.

At the angle from which he sat, I could easily pretend That he was looking at me. My own body flushed. Shame-

less to say, I had up a hard. My groin ached for his touch, for this madness, this vital and electric madness that was upon him. I remembered the way his naked thighs, those bronze rounded, metal hard thighs looked when he was in his basketball shorts, and I could feel them pressing into me. Every nerve in my body tingled as though I had been charged with volts.

The principal, a tall, almost bald man in his late forties, named Doty, and a name of which so aptly fit his graying, morbid personality, rose from his seat and came to where Christine was dancing, her hips now making wide arcs like the ringing of a bell, her naked arms uplifted, her hair cascading like falling water. At his approach, she stopped dancing and they stood looking at each other. His dull eyes, morosely grey, pierced hers and she gave him stare for stare, hers emerald and tipped with fire. She was a strikingly beautiful girl and as he continued to stare at her I could see her straighten her shoulders, lift her chin haughtily, appearing taller, more dignified than she really was.

"Go put on some clothes," he finally said, shaming her before the entire assembly, so pure, he considered himself, he could not endure. For his own righteous sake, the fact so lividly factual that she had exposed her aval. And he said it with more directness of tone, with more emphasis upon his own immaculate self than Jesus would have said: "You have sinned."

"You son of a bitch!" Christine said back at him without blinking an eye. She had inherited her haughtiness from her mother, a hard boiled woman who worked at a night club on the Turnpike, and her regards for others, and her utter lack of humor often placed her at a disavantage. She hurried from the hall, crying, her face in her hands.

There was a sudden uproarious chorus from all the boys who began to boo the principal. For most of them, this was their last year at school, and they did not give a fiddlers damn about the principal's approval or disapproval. In fact, they gloried at any excuse to display their natural instincts for mischief, and always took shameful advantage of any opportunity to do so.

After the dance, and long after everyone had gone home, I stood in front of the auditorioum waiting for Maurice to come and pick me up. The lights were out

in the upper hall and porchway ceiling and the darkness, with low hovering rain clouds, gave to the dormitories a ghostly quality, an unreal overcast to the whole scene. I paced up and down the sidewalk which ran the full length of the auditorioum, turning at the corner of the building then back again like a sentry on guard duty. I was beginning to think that Maurice had taken my advice at face value and had gone out and screwed a girl after all. I looked at my watch (the one he had given me) and it was half past ten, parties and outings never lasted long in this area, and I grew impatient. I was at the corner of the auditorioum now and was making up my mind, or trying to, on whether to start walking home or to wait longer when I heard what to me sounded like the clang of a hub cap. Straining my eyes in that direction I saw the bulk of a car outlined against the naked limbs of dead trees near the rear of the building. I went to investigate. Approaching the car I saw someone bending over one of the rear wheels. At my sound he straightened up, a little startled.

It was Luther.

At the sight of him, so unexpectedly, for I thought he had gone long ago, I was so excited I could hardly breathe. My hopes soared.

"Why — hi, Rex," he said, smiling, as though he was glad to see me, or someone – anyone.

I greeted him back, a little nervously I realized, for my voice trembled oddly, like a foolish girl's, I thought.

"Where is Cecile?" I asked, selfishly glad he and I were alone.

"Oh, she had to return in the car with some of the other girls," he answered readily, and he did not seem too disappointed. "You know how their mother's are, can't trust their daughters out of their sight."

No – I did not know. But I nodded.

"Got a flat," he continued. "Won't take but a minute. Lost you ride?"

"Maurice had a date," I lied. "Looks like he's not coming back."

He wiped his brow.

"Lend me a hand and I'll take you home."

We fixed the flat, our shoulders touching, occasionally our hands, and at each touch it was like sticking my

finger in a light socket. He was coatless, and though it was unusually dark I could see the play of his muscles through the thin white material of his shirt, could see the gradual roundness of his lower back whenever he bent over and the glowing white cloth, almost luminous, tightened against his flesh. Every movement he made, every gesture, appeared pre-rehearsed, like a highly skilled acrobat on a trapeze, or was it because, through my natural adoration of him, his body, his courteous ways, I saw something beyond and above. Something more radiant than his true self, something others failed to notice, something wonderful and beautiful others were too hurried, too careless to see.

I enjoyed every second fixing the flat with him, and wished vainly that the whole motor had fallen out so we could work on the car all night together.

When we were in the car and he had sped through Florence, that dark, sleepy one street town, he slowed the acceleration when we approached the gravel road which led north toward my home, then brought the car to a stand still.

"Listed," he said, "I just thought of something. Instead of driving you all that way to your house, why not come and spend the night. with me. Mama and Daddy are in Vicksburg for the week-end visiting aunt Beatrice and uncle Albert, and we can have the house to ourselves."

I did not hesitate to think. I did not have to. It was too good to be true. My heart raced like a wild animal's after a mile long chase.

I said, "yes," with the same enthusiasm as if I had said, "take me."

I knew my mother and father would be worried about me, and there were few phones in the vicinity, but if they worried themselves into the insane asylum at Whitfield I still would have gone. A team of mules could not have dragged me from his car.

Luther's bedroom, of that wing of the house, which was approached from the main part of the structure by a rooted walkway, especially built apart from the house with the purpose in mind by his parents that he would someday bring his bride there to live – a custom handed down since pre civil war days and still practiced

throughout the south – bachelor's quarters they were called, was the epitome of Luther himself. It was as masculine as a country club, and almost as elegant, with its dark mahogony furnishings, its huge brass knobs on things the shape of a lion's head, the rows of books, rifle racks, trophies, school pictures, boots, whips, pistols, bow and arrows, deep solid colors, polish and masculine scents.

All the things that men love, and surround themselves with. He had his own private bath, kitchen, and small bar, though he did not drink nor smoke, or did I, and he was set up as independently as a monarch, or a prince – better a prince, for that's what he was to me. To this very day, this very moment, looking back some twenty five years or more, the quality of him dominates all the people I have known since. None of them have reached his plateau, nor have touched my heart as he touched it.

We had a cold snack from his sparkling emerald and mahogany kitchen, (we were always eating then), then we went to bed. I stripped completely naked, my way of an invitation, and lay on the side of the bed toward the window. Automatically, he followed suit. As he stripped, I noticed him looking my behind and there was about his eyes that same alert look he had when watching Christine dance. He came around to the bed, at intervals looking around at the furnishings as though for the first, but always dragging them back again and over my body. He stood then a few paces from the little wall lapms which hung over his neat, and highly polished desk, and its shower of gold poured over his naked form and made him look as though he had been dipped in molten amber.

No God, from that old world of ancient beauty, and grace never possessed in marble nor granite, which this live – and very much alive – person possessed in structure and proportion. I had dreamed it to be exactly like this. It matched the exactness of the rest of him. But the imagination sees these things, though they are concealed, as the imagination sees the breasts of a woman through her brassiere, and through that imagination sensuous sensations are born. I almost went faint at the sight of him.

All my dreams, my aspirations, my secret ambitions,

had led to this moment. I had imagined a million, million, times, both awake and when asleep, Luther standing before me unclothed. If there is anything such as a pre-knowledged sense, and I believe there is, he was exactly as I had dreamed him to be. My instincts, though young I was, told me that a body as perfect as Luther's could not be utterly ruined by an imperfect organ.

His eyes on me, on my legs, sent wild tremors through me so I turned slightly, reckless now by that look, and stared obviously at his crotch. I kept my eyes there purposely, sending out a message to him, those wordless messages that could tell more than a whole dictionary of words.

I looked at him then, a wild, meaningful look, and his eyes found mine They burned, and the air between us was charged with our emotions. No magnet in the world, even those lodestar stones in the middle of the earth which pulls billions of compass needles toward them, were frail, compared to the sensuous pull of our eyes. Then, he glanced quickly at the window where lightening flashed wildly, and the shadows of the limbs outside on the trees lashed at the panes.

"It's a storm coming up," he said dryly, as if there was nothing else to say.

Then, his eyes sought mine again and there was that same leaping light, that silvery glare, that star-like sparkle I was to see may times in the future and would instantly know what it conveyed. For the first time in my life I was seeing and reading the tell tale knowledge that word of mouth is inadequate to convey. I would come to know men by that sparkle, that beacon, that signal. I would come to know them and to recognize their craves. Later, years later, I would come to know that men – men like me – used this same glitter as a means to recognize and to telegraph their kind. Even across the world, as far away as Germany, France, Italy, the islands, that hallmark would become universal. Men would speak to men with their eyes, would instantly recognize in their silvery, celestral lights, their strangeness – their counterparts. A German could walk into a bar in the Bermuda islands and he, if he was like me, would recognize his counterpart in the

eyes of those present, though he cannot speak nor understand their language, and they not speaking nor understanding his. So, as Luther looked at me, that storm threatening night, which was natures way of aiding the homosexual. I was seeing something, something in those beautiful sparkling eyes that would later come to help me time and time again. That would make my life easier, that would guide me to those men, those boys, those strange aliens of our society. Even in a crowd of people I would be able, in time, to use natures precious gift to us, and could pick out those merely by looking at them.

But all that was ahead somewhere in the dark, unknown hiatus of my future. Now, this moment, this intant, everything was vital, physical, with none of the psychology of the mind.

Luther turned out the light and eased in beside me. I still lay with my back to him, facing the window, where, now in the darkness, the world outside took on a semblance of light, slate gray light underscored at intervals by blinding flashes of light which lit up the whole room.

I could feel Luther's physical presence beside me, could hear the steady cadence of his breathing. Though he lay at least two feet from me, the warmth of his body, his masculinity spread across to me and caressed my back, my shoulders, my legs. There are some people that warm, even without the desire for sex, as I desired sex with Luther this moment, who radiate their heat, the warmth of their blood to others who are near. l knew this because my kid brother was like that. It was impossible to sleep in the same bed with him during the summertime. His mere touch, a toe or a finger, was like a fire coal.

Suddenly, the wind outside grew fierce, the sky darked, and the limbs on the trees dipped and swayed, throwing fantastic patterns on the white stuccoed walls, on the gilt framed paintings, on the dark, wine colored furniture, and their shadows in turn were flung up like springing monsters. A streak of lightening torn down the sky, transforming the world into mid-day brightness, followed by a clap of thunder which shook the house and rattled the window pains.

Unconsiously, I let out a faint cry and flinched.

It was Luther's cue.

He moved closer and lay a hand on my shoulder.

"Afraid of lightning?" he asked lowly.

I turned slightly, almost on my back. He did not remove his hand.

"No," I said, "not actually. It was just unexpected, that's all."

He put his arm around my chest. I could hear his breathing. He was very near me now, the full length of his body next to mine, my right arm buried in the deep hollow of his chest. His body was on fire, glowing, radiating, as though a cauldron roared from within him. For one so hot, it would appear that they would glow, incandescent, like a lamp.

I was riding the high tide of ecstasy, supreme now and completely happy that Luther, this handsome, well built boy, whom I had admired so, had longed for, was lying beside me, completely unclothed, his arm around me. If there was no more than this, it was utter bliss to me. Enshrouded rapture, without sex, without making love, without passions. Yet – even as I thought these things, lying so near him, taken completely out of time and place, out of my senses, he moved closer, put both arms around me and kissed me full upon the mouth.

His kiss lasted, it seemed, for an eon. His mouth was hot and in that kiss, he swallowed me. He drank the whole of my being, moving his head to and fro like a calf at an udder. Instantly, my mouth parted and his tongue, as silken, as soft as a hummingbird's, filled the darkness of my mind. I went limp. I surrendered. All this pent up time, these strained emotions of wanting him, the trembling fear, the recklessness. the timeless void without him, broke free at lat, uncaged by his lips on mine, and love and passion and desire flowed through my trembling body as freely as a waterfall.

How beautiful love was. How wonderous, when you are loved at last by the one who has captured your heart. I thanked God in heaven, and if there is a God, he heard me. I am sure he heard me.

I gave a sigh of relief, or of joy, or of bliss, a sigh some men would have called wanton, and Luther turned

me slowly on my stomach. His hot, wonderous body eased on top of mine, pressing against me, so that his thick body hair, especially around his crotch, like a bird's nest, pricked my flesh, and I loved its coarsness. No drive shaft ever moved through a cylinder with the absolute directness as did Luther. He instinctively knew the anatomy of my body and there was no fumbling with the hands, as with Norman and Maurice, no repeated tries, no akward maneuvering of his own body. His body, with its regular thrust, was like a piston moving in warm oil. I was acutely aware of him. Yet, I loved every moment, and longed that he would never get through, that he would tars me forever, that this night would go on and on without ending, that we would die here together in this beautiful room, while the rain lashed at the windows outside, making it seem that this abode lay somewhere beneath the tides.

Heaven was hell, compared to this paradise, for at last, my dreams were conquered, and I was so happy it was difficult for me to believe that it was actually Luther who was on top of me, whose strong hands caressed my neck, my shoulders, my face, that it was actually his voice that was saying those lovable, wonderous words to me.

Then he was through, and what ecstasy that ending was, the full glory of his fine body tapping the darkest places within me, I lay in his arms as he kissed me again and again, on my lips, my chin, tilting my head to kiss me on the neck, my ears, my hair.

"Can I say something?" he asked in a drowsy voice, between his kisses. He pulled me still closer to him, squeezing me so tightly against him I could barely breathe.

"Yes," I whispered.

"You are the purtiest person I have ever seen."

"Thanks," I said, in utter thanksgiving.

I noticed he used the word (person) rather than boy or girl, which put us in a special category.

"You have a beautiful body," he went on, his hands caressing my back, down to my ass in indication.

"So have you," I said knowingly, realizing now at this moment, and during his sex that there was an even greater beauty about him than merely his bone struc-

tur, his muscles, the radiance of his skin, and that was the person he was inside, that wonderous warm, considerate, lovable being, his enormous heart.

Yet, despite his deep interest in m sexually, despite the way he made love to me, I was desperate to know something else about him, wanted to assure myself that he did not think his strange (our love making, our sex) longed to ask him this before daylight came and broke our spell and that we may become strangers. But, mercifully, and fortunate for me, I did not have to ask. He answered my question for me.

"Daddy has a hunting lodge at Hoover lake," he said close to my ear. He let his hand slide under my chin. He turned my face to his. He kissed me warmly on th lips. "We can spent the week-ends there this summer when school is out."

So I sad my answer. The light of another day would not shatter into tragic illusions what we had meant to each other in the darkness. He was planning on having sex with me again. He was laying out a future for us, selecting in his mind a secret hiding place for us, calculating future havens and future paradise.

"I am yours for as long as you want me," I said invitingly to him. I wanted him to know how I truly felt. I wanted to put it into words and for him to hear those words from my own lips this confession that lay next to my heart. I did not want any illusions nor any misunderstandings between us. I wanted to surrender to him and to let him know that I was surrendering. I wanted him to know that I was his.

"I will never stop wanting you," he said, declaring the happiness of the ages. I sighed heavily, swept away and into heaven on the magic of those words. How joyous life had become to me, how fortunate I was, to live out my young, virile days ahead in his arms, having him love me, smothering me with his strong brown arms and limbs. So, as the rain storm hurled itself out of the night, I lay in Luther's arms thinking of our future, dreaming news dreams I never dared dream, nor even dared think before. And whatever went on outside, storm and rain and raging winds, here – here inside his lovely room – was mine and Luther's world.

During that following summer, which was the happiest in my life, Luther saw me almost constantly. And

the more I saw him, the more I came to learn about him, to discover what I had never before discovered. He became all the more wonderous, not only to me, but the kind of person he was. He was the perfect companion – and lover. No an ever loved a woman, nor provoked such avid interest, nor kept that love rekindled constantly, as much as Luther loved me. He never slackened once in his vital love interest, nor tired of somthering me with his limitless affection, always abundant with untiring energy, always a little reckless with his exasperating charm, always keeping our relation alive, always making love to me and having sex whenever he could bet me alone.

I will never forget the first time he called at the house. He brought me a box of candy, exactly as he would have done had I been a girl. This handsome, smiling boy was actually paying court to me.

"You must give it to Leah," my mother said afterwards. Leah was my sister, listed as Angelic in the family bible, but we called her Leah.

"But. Mamma, Luther brought it to me," I protested.

"Boys do not give candy to other boys," she insisted. "I am sure he intended it for Leah. He is merely inexperienced and shy with girls."

Ha! If she only knew!

I sulled, but gave the candy to my sister. But what matter. I had Luther's body, his heart. I did not need his gifts. Yet, I was annoyed at my mother's twisted faith in others, even those she did not know. Her blind faith in human nature, the purity that was in her unable to see impurity in others addled my nerves. I remember once long ago when I was about eight years old. A tramp came to the door one cold winter night begging for food and lodging. There were many such men during that time of depression, tramps and hobos wandering over the country, penniless, homeless. He and my father had sat before the fire long into the night, my father listening attentively to the old bearded man relate his travels. That night my mother let him have the guest room.

"But Mamma," I cried in a shrieking voice, remembering the old man's earlier confessions. "He is an exconvict – a murderer."

"It's no matter," she said calmly, her marble black

eyes on mine. “I figure a liar will keep on lying, and a thief will keep on stealin. But a murdered never commits but one murder. Besides, he must have had a good reason for killing his wife”

That night, I had hardly slept, thinking of the tat-Tered odl man in the polished guest room, lying between The finest sheets in the house, on luxurious feather Pillows, that would have to be laundered the next day – all due to my mother’s unrealistic faith in human nature. She was equally fooled about Luther’s frequent visits, believing he was paying calls on my sister, never knowing, and she would never know, that he was actually calling on me.

My mother liked Luther, regarding him as the most perfect of gentlemen, which he was, and because he bragged of her cooking, she out did herself whenever she knew he was coming, turning out gourmets he loved and tempting him with new recipes.

Hardly a day passed during that fabulous summer between school semesters that Luther and I did not go horseback riding along an old Indian trail toward the far reaches of my father’s property. My sister usually accompanied us. She was an excellent horsewoman and she and Luther got on well together, though he was thre years younger than she, and the world was cleverly deceived. In this way, Luther and I kept our secret, and I enjoyed seeing him and my sister frolicking together, enjoying it with a tingling sensation of utter triumph, for I was certan he was a little over friendly with her as a ruse to polish over our relation and to erase any doubt to our inner feelings, and the possibility of us showing those feelings in public.

We still had our rendeveous though, spending every week end at his father’s lodge at Hoover lake. It was like playing house with him, doing our own cooking together, the washing of dishes, the cleaning of the lodge, the starry nights sitting and talking near the lake, the ecstacy of nights in the same bed, loving two, sometimes three times, and many times never going to sleep at all, just lying in each others arms, talking, listening to his record player, making love.

Too, we found our moments when he came to our house. At the far extremity of my father’s land, beyond where the old Indian trail played out, there is a huge

outcropping of lime stone. It rises out of the earth like a gargantuan skull, utterly smooth, casket gray in color, and is about twenty feet high and spreads out over a quarter of an acre of land. Through some freak of nature it has split in two and each half has receeded, leaving a space in the center of about four feet wide. We always called it "split rock" and had played on it when children. That section between, lay sprinkled with shiny brown pine needles and was as soft and snug as a carpet. In this protected alcove, hidden from the rest of th world, Luther and I lay nude, sometimes even in the rain, with the sprinkling of drops from the emerald canopy of leaves over our heads dripping like tears, making our bodies shine like china as we loved each other, as he entred me, as warm as a martyr's heart.

That coming fall though, like so many boys in the county were doing, Luther joined the Navy, due mainly because his father's insistence that he get his training early, with the possibility of a commission, before war broke out. No one knew at the time to what proportions the war would mushroom into, nor to what duration it would last. Luther was away three months, and came back from the United States Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, New York a First Lieutenant. He had only ten days at home and I got to see him but once, so many of his kin people keeping him occupied, and that was on the night before his last day at home.

I borrowed my father's car and drove over to where he lived. I had phoned earlier that I was coming, and whn I reached his house I sat on a wrought iron bench under the trees on the front lawn and waited for him.

I was dressed in a black suit, one a cousin of mine had sent me from Italy, which tapered elegantly, and a pale pink shirt and coat handkerchief and black tie, which was the fashion that year for men. The radiant pink set off my smooth dark skin to perfection. It had taken me two hours to bathe and dress, with my ritual of numerous lotions, and now, as I sat patiently in the cool evening shade, I felt better, felt more alive, than I had ever felt in my whole life.

I gazed at the house which crowned the knoll in quiet

dignity.

The house which had sheltered Luther since infancy. At the white stucco walls, the red tile roof, the montage of Spanish daggers Luther had planted near the entrance to his bachelor quarters, and never had I loved it so much as on this joyous moment. Here, Luther had been born, had been reared, had lived out his grammar and high school years, had blossomed into full blown maturity. Here, behind those lovely walls, he had made his first love to me. Here, he had experienced sex, and with me, for the first time. It was so unlike the sprawling, two story ante-bellum house in which I had been born and reared. To me, it was like a Greek temple, more beautiful because Luther lived in it, as beautiful and flowing as a woman's body, as a ship in full sail, all the more precious to me because I had found love, ultimate and profound love beneath its roof. Here I had dreamed, had planned, had aspired, (Oh, what a foolish thought), had aspired to be mistress.

I had not waited long when Luther came down the curving tile steps to greet me. He had on his white uniform, with barracks cap and all, the gold braid glittering in the late afternoon sun like the jewels on the breastplates of a pagan prince. He smiled as he came up to me and I rose and looked at him, my knees trembling, my heart rising in my throat, threatening me with tears.

"Oh, God, if I could only take you in my arms," he said slowly, his deep lavender eyes, with that same intoxicating sparkle, burning into mine.

"l have missed you," I managed to say quietly, requiring all my courage not to run to him, to ease my aching heart in the warm mansion of his chest.

"I will never be separated from you again, ever," he said hoarsely, his deep voice primed with emotion, his hand, warmly, taking hold of mine.

"Please," I whispered, glancing toward the house. "Your mother and father."

"I don't care," he came back passionately, too passionately, for the sound of his voice broke under the strain of our absence from the other, and there was terror and doom in hi swords. "Besides," he added. "They know about us – know everything."

"What!" I cried, stung to the core. Now, I was really

frightened.

He looked down at me and there was determination in his eyes. He was sad, somehow, and that look of sadness wrunk the deepest ramparts of my heart. I could not bear to know if he was unhappy, not my gallant, handsome, debonair, Luther.

"Daddy picked out who he wanted to love, and I will pick out who I want to love." He shrugged. "I think you are the most beautiful person I have ever known, not just your small body, my dear, not just your face, your eyes, but all of you, your mind and your heart. I love you, and no one is going to stop me from loving you, or seeing you. I want you and I will always want you. The whole world can crumble to dust at my feet. Everyone can hate me for it, I do not care. But you are mine. I will never let you belong to anyone else."

He looked away, the bright light in his watery eyes dulled by something I could not understand at the time but that I would come to understand later, and he seemed bitter somehow, older. Something was hurting him, affecting him deeply, something more than being in the service, something more than merely being away from home.

At the thought of him like this, remote from me, his mind wandering to far off places where I could not follow, I wanted to rush to him, to let him love me, to take the sadness out of his face, his eyes, to bring joy and laughter back. I did not care if his father and mother saw through the windows, if the world saw. What the hell did I care about rules, stupied laws, respect, honor. They were nothing but words, shadows on the wall compared to my and Luther's love for each other.

"Oh, Luther, something is wrong – terribly wrong," I cried. my own eyes, on the verge of tears, naked with pleading.

He looked at me then and the light in his eyes returned, wide and crystal clear.

"The only thing that is wrong is that I left you here alone, not really realizing just how much I cared. But now I know and I will never leave you again. Wherever I may happen to go, I will always take you with me."

So that was why he seemed older—eons and eons older. Love, profound and profane, had aged him, his heart,

his mind, and hardened him. That was the reason he had told his parents about us.

He too, had no truck with law, respect, honor.

In that instant, he swept me into his arms.

"Let them look," he murmured, pressing my body to his, his warm lips kissing mine, hurting, bruising.

All life, all reason, all sense of reality, swept away in that moment, leaving only him and me in the shadow filled countryside of our remoted present. Even the house, the gardens, the lawn, receeded like a sign post Long past, forever dimmed now by the dull apathy of our love. I was swallowed up in his strong brouze arms and in his soft, warm lips on mine. The world was drowned out, blinded by the unreal, yet vividly real import of my passion, and there was a roaring in my ears like the roaring of sea shells.

"I'll take you to the lodge," he uttered hoarsely, the sound of his voice near mine commanding all my world. He swept me toward his car and, for a fleeting instant of start reality, of terror, I wondered what his mother and father were thinking about us, what was in their hearts as Luther sped me through that autumn dusk, through lonely dirt roads crimson with fallen leaves, over hillsides faintly, tiredly gold in the approaching sunset.

Later, much later, when Luther's passion was spent, and we stood together out on the little porch of the cabin looking at the stars, at the lake shimmering in the moonlight, breathing deep into our lungs the cool, night air, I forgot what the world thought, what his mother thought, forgot there was anything but Luther standing beside me, and that we were together again. He was wearing his jockey shorts and his white navy tunic draped over his shoulders (Indian summer is always cool) and the light of the moon flooded his physique and framed him against the dark doorway. He was staring across the lake and that deep study was back again on his face, in his eyes, remote, troubled, and it tormented me.

"Thinking of your mother and father?" I asked calmly, uprooting agonies.

"No, baby," he said half heartedly, not looking at me." Oh, yes—suppose I am." He hung his head. "It's – It's not that I care what they think, I don't They

have lived their lives, and I intend to live mine."

True – he was that strong willed, that determined. I admired him for it, especially when that determination included me. ‘

"What then?" I asked simply.

"It's just that – that I want to keep you without a fight, without hurting others, like I had you before I joined up. Everything was so easy then. The life we had was our own, without anyone else interference, without anyone knowing. Now, things are so complicated. I had tell mama and daddy because I intend to stay with you, whether they like it or not. In time they would have found out. Before I joined the navy I thought they would never find out, not that I give a damn, but – now." He stammered, his voice faultering.

I was on the brink of histerics. Something – or some one – was invading our world, and I was up in arms

"But what?" I asked, and my voice trembled.

He looked at me for a kind moment, then back again at the lake.

"Rex, the world is swarming with our kind. I kidded myself in trying not to believe that until I went north God, how I hate Yankees! They make fun – call us fairies, queers! Not – not that they called me that – they never had a reason. But there was on boy there. H was like – he was like a girl, and they treated him awful. If only they understood. If – if only they knew how wonnderful it is like you and I are together. They make it sound so bad. And it isn't bad, nor awful, nor dirty, nor shameful. It's just that some at them try and make it awful, like in the bar's, wearing make-up like girls, shirts like blouses, with dyed hair and jewels."

I looked at him, hanging breathlessly onto his every word. He was talking of things utterly alien to me, and I could not endure with any fortitude the sound of his voice if it did not contain love for me.

"What does it all matter," I said more factual, hoping to soothe him, to bring hi mback from that other terrible world and into that world I had created for us.

"You are right, he assured, pulling me to him. "It just made me think, I guess. I thought of us while I was up there, riding horses, having fun, clean healthy fun, and I prayed to God that we would never get mixed

up in that filthy trash. We are men, as much man as anyone. Just because we love each other does not make us freaks. I love you and I do not care what it looks like or what people think about it. If mama and daddy hate me, if the service men hate me, if the Yankees –"

"They do not hate you," I stammered, laying my head in the hollow of his chest. An emotion was being born in both of us, the consideration for the respect of others. We had never considered these impossibilities before. And because it was hurting him, worrying him, sending his mind and his thoughts into dark places he never before had explored, I began to cry.

That the world should trample this kind, magnificent person, that the callowness of the universe should degrade him, shame him when there was no element shame, infuriated me. My foot high frame became a tempest in a tea pot. I wanted to fight back at the world, to defend him, to save his glorious honor – his manhood.

"Now – now, baby, don't cry," he soothed, stroking my hair. Lifting my face to his, he kissed me warmly. "I will be stationed in Pensacola. Tonight, when you go home, pack a suitcase. I am taking you with me. I will be by to pick you up in the morning."

But it was not Luther who came driving slowly up the drive to our house the next day, the familiar white station wagon a decorous note under the shadowy ferns of my moss. It was his mother, Mrs. Faron.

"I want to speak to Rex – in private," she said politely, as my mother greeted her on the front steps. Courteously, my mother ushered her into the living room, called me from my bedroom, where I was putting the finishing touchs to my packing, and closed the wide French doors upon us.

I admit I was ill at ease, a bit nervous, a bit cautious by this sedate woman standing before me, a woman who would have been strikingly beautiful had there been any spontaneous sparkle about her features. She had the face of a madonna, sad, wilful, expressionless. Only the life in her eye, and that too, was sad, saved her from being termed simply plain.

I asked her to sit down.

She refused, going to the white lace curtained windows where she lifted their folds and peered out onto

the autumn countryside.

"I guess Luther has told you that Raymond and I know about you," she said, tremulous, still looking out the window, her eyes purposely avoiding mine.

"Yes, he has told me," I said, blushing I know, shamed by the knowledge that this woman, Luther's mother, knew what we had been doing in bed. For the first time in my life, I felt pangs of guilt.

Then she turned and faced me.

"I do not pretend to understand such things," she continued, and with as much dignity as she could muster. "And I am not condemning you, saying it's all your fault, nor declaring it is right or wrong. God never intended me to be that clever about people. I am only interested in my son, and what happens to him. Do you understand?"

I nodded. Momentarily I felt sorry for her.

"This is no future. Whatever your relationship appears to amount to, it is no future for either of you. He says he loves you, whatever that means (she lowered her eyes), that he – that he wants to live – to stay with you. Raymond and I have always tried to understand our son, to give him what he needs to have. But we have not spoiled him. We have always given him the opportunity to use his own judgement, unless we deemed it necessary to us ours, all for his best interest at heart. But this. (she held out both hands in gesture). He cannot marry you. You are no girl. There can be on children. What then? He does not, at his age, even know what love is."

I thought he did. My eyes hardened on hers. She braced herself. She seemed taller, somehow, surer of herself and the roll she had no doubt rehearsed over and over in her mind.

"Rex," she went on, coming a little closer to me. She lay a hand on my arm. "We have always like you, Raymond and I. And we truly think you are a fine boy. We have discussed this among ourselves and feel that you and Luther, perhaps in – in this way, are overly emotional, overly affectionate and responded to one another, a relation which will pass and one on which you will look back with shame. You are both strong, handsome, young men, who should be dating girls,

having fun, who should marry, and who should father children. Luther is going away, for how long, we do not know. If war comes, he may never come back. We would not hurt him for anything in the world, but we know this is not happiness, so we have taken firm measures in order to protect him – to save him."

My heart pounded like a drum. I sensed the premonition of her words, the fatal conclusion to her ultimatum.

"What measures?" I implored, fighting for all that I had in the world that was worth keeping.

She hesitated.

"We have sent him on to Florida this morning," she said after that recall. "Against his will of course, but, never the less he is gone."

He is gone! How fatal, how final were the sound of those words, like the lonely peal of a bell on a mountain. like a train tearing through the night.

I had lost him.

It was as complete, as absolute as that.

"You must promise me," she insisted, her eyes rimmed with tears.

"Promise that I will not go to him?" I asked, my courage gone, my desire to fight back ebbing in strength.

"That, and more," she answered. "You must never see him, nor write him, nor even get in touch with him – ever!"

I came back in retaliation.

"But what about Luther, what if he wants to – to be with me?"

"He may want to," she uttered, and she underscored that one word may. "But we will stop him, of course."

Of course! The cruelty of the world would stop him- Let him suffer. Let him eat out his heart in agony and in loneliness. But stop him of course. It was not enough that the world created him in the way that he was, exiling him from the highroads of society. The world as well must mutilate his heart.

I hung my head in silence, praying I suppose. My eyes traced the intricate patterns on the rose carpet.

"Then you want me to forget him, to treat him as you treat him," I said then, though I knew I was defeated. "Starve his heart. Lock him out of the world, rob him, just so long as what he does is right?

She played her triumph card.

"Rex – if you love him, if you really care for him, you would let him go, let him marry Cecile, let him father children, let him lead a normal life. If you love him, then you will promise me."

It was over. I had truly lost him.

"I promise," I said, not looking at her.

So, he was to marry Cecile! I hated her. Luther could not have her. No! No! That was wrong. If Luther wanted her, then she must have her.

She fumbled in her purse and handed me a ring.

"He wants you to have this, she said, her voice trembling as if she stood in a raging wind. She took my hand and slipped it on my finger.

"But, that is his graduation ring," I protested.

"He wants you to have it," she insisted, patting my arm. "He – he never liked jewelry anyway."

It was her way of saying that Luther did not like me.

She turned to go, but at the French doors she paused, and she gave one lasting sigh.

"Rex," she said meaningfully, her voice defiant. "I am older than you, much older; and perhaps wiser. I want to tell you something, something I told to Luther before he left. Do you want to hear it?"

I nodded. Why not. She had taken everything anyway.

"Once, long ago when I was very young," she began, "and Raymond was courting me, long before we were married, we made a trip to New Orleans. Through a natural mistake of his he took me to a certain lounge, a bar whose single attraction was an act put on by a female empersonator. This boy, this handsome boy, small like you, almost pretty in the face, was dressed in female attire and he sang and danced. Under the soft lighting, the music, the fabulous clothes, it was easy to imagine that he was a girl. But when his act was over and he had switched to all male attire, he came down from the stage and mingled with the audience. He sat next to me on a bar stool and, curious, I watched him for a moment. I drew this conclusion, and I pass it on to you – as I passed it on to Luther. He proved one thing. He was not a real man, and he most certainly would never be a real woman."

Her voice, her manner, welled up in me the memory of another time, another place when I had stood, and

with another woman standing judgment over me, laying down laws, settling my life for me. It had been at the State Fair in Jackson the fall before, I had gone into one of the freak shows and there on the stage, had stood this tall, gangly Morphodite. She was dressed like a woman, with high heeled slippers, a bra and silken panties, overclouded with a long silken robe, and her hair was dyed, and so were her eyes, and there was heavy rouge on her cheeks and lips. Yet, she had a man's legs and arm, elongated arms, with the veins showing. I could tell that the hair on her legs had been shaved. She had given a brief talk, utilizing scientific words for her existence, words I had not understood, and emphasizing parts of her anatomy as she gave her lecture. Physically, she possessed both male and female organs, and her voice, husky and jerky, was like a man's voice, and though her fingernails were polished and trimmed her fists were huge, surely that of man's. She intoxicated me, this man, this woman, this male and female. I stood there watching her, completely enthralled, completely captivated, by this strange, alien creature. Once, during her lecture, a group of teen age girls, obviously from the country like me, began to giggle at her. Immediately, she halted her show and came down the steps to where they stood. As long as live I will never forget what she said to those giggling, foolish, silly girls.

"You laugh," she had said in her husky, masculine voice, her hand up rigidly, one limp wrist like that of a swan, her thick fingers tapping a half smoked cigarette. "But remember, someday you will marry and you will become mothers. And you do not know what your children will be."

So again, here this woman stood, Luther's mother, mother, like the strange half-woman, half-man, sending out wisdom. Yet, the morphodite had clearly understood the tragedy of birth, an outcast in the same society which had bred her, and would feel that tragedy, no doubt, again and again in the ones, like her, she would come to meet. For this, I could forgive her. But I would never forgive Luther's mother for not understanding her own son.

"I hope, for your sake, that you will always remem-

ber this and will apply it to your own life," she said on leaving, as though she was the personification of the wisdom of the ages.

"What was that all about?" my mom asked, after the shiny white station wagon had gone down the shadowy drive.

"Nothing," I said bitterly, heading for my room. "It's just that – that I am not going with Luther after all."

"I will never understand you," my mother called to me as I slipped on my boots and went out the back door. "The older you get the more mysterious, When you were younger –"

I did not wait to her the rest and, saddling my stallion, I rode him at breath neck speed down through the pasture, through the harvested field of hay, through the winding, shadow-laden Indian Trail, bringing him to a lather as I reached split-rock.

There I dismounted, threw the reins on a near by limb, and sank down on the pine needle nest where Luther and I had loved – oh, on those long gone times – times that would never be again.

He was gone from me forever. I had lost him. I cried on the soft nest of needles, wetting the love carpet with my tears. I hugged the ground where we had lain during that ecstasy of the past.

There came to mind an old bit of poetry that Luther had read to me one night at the lodge. I put it with my thoughts, my agony.

Oh, Luther! I come, my Luther. I come to your own dear arms! Soon I will find you, and, wrapped in a love undying and divine, together we will float through all the depths of space, and, lips to lips, and eyes to eyes, drink of desires grown more sweet with every draught! Or if I cannot find you, then I will sink in peace down the poppied ways or sleep: and for me the breast of night, where I shall be softly cradled, will seem your chest. Luther! Oh, I die! Come, please come Luther and give me peace!

I lay three all night, reliving the glory of our life

A week later, sick at heart, miserable, weary in body and in mind, I joined the Marines.

CHAPTER 4

My mother wrung her hands, her dark French eyes imploringly on mine as she followed me about the great house, the rooms, pleading, begging me to remain until I had completed high school. My father also pleaded, but with his dark silences, his hurt eyes trailing after me. That sad, silent, face, more deplorable than my mothers tearful, rasping intonations.

But my spirits drooped, despite the efforts of the whole household to revive them. Mentally, I was dazed and sick. No one knew that it was a broken heart which made me so irritable, so listless by turns. Too, it was utter boredom, bewilderment since Luther was gone, his absense which made me look so woebegone. My boredom was acute and ever present.

For the first time in my life, I actually hated SUB-ROSA, my father's horse and cotton plantation. Its name meaning under the rose. Hated those soft flowers under their canopies of shade, the most garlanded drive down into the countryside which led from the house, hated the long red road going down to Pearl River, hated the fields, white now with cotton. Every foot of grown, and every tree and brook, every lane and bridle trail reminded me of Luther. He belonged now, perhaps, to some one else, was gone now into the service and maybe into war, surely, if war should come, but his ghost still haunted the roads in the twilight. Still smiled at me from drowsy lavender eyes from the white columned porch. I never heard the sound of hooves coming up the road from Florence that for a sweet moment I did not think – Luther!

Yes, hated Subrosa, where once I had loved it. Even hated split rock, though I rode my horse there every day, remaining to lick my wounds, even perhaps to feel sorry for myself, and everytime I returned home I lay down on my bed morosely and refused to get up for supper. The country, with its memories, now was impossible, and any change, even the Marines, was welcome.

So I left that great house in Mississippi, whose tragic, melancholy beauty matched my own, whose somber Portals, sunken beneath its army of moss laden trees,

its fortress of bordered Spanish dagger, charged by the sun, taking on a sorrowful martyrdom under its autumn light was more intolerable than I could bear.

I left my father seated in the library, with his Italian heart overflowing with love – and grief, and whose last words to me of reproof merely heightening his deep, undying love for my mother. "You should not go and leave her," he said, eliminating his own sorrow in considering hers, "and her so gentle. It will break her heart. It will wound her gentleness."

I left my mother standing on that spacious front gallery, dwarfed by those luminous columns which towered up two stories high to touch the polished leaves of the magnolias, her face branded with tears. Who, long since I had discovered, had little of the gentleness which my father credited her with, but a strength, a fiber-hard strength and determination he would never possess himself. She kissed me numbly on the cheek and in that moment of farewell, she looked tired, old, as old and ancient as the house, as the flowers planted a hundred years ago. But going down the shadowy drive with my oldest brother driving me to the depot in Jackson, I turned once and looked back. I saw her straighten her shoulders, arch her back in that gesture of defeatless dignity, and it went to my heart.

I left, too, the class ring Luther had given me to be stored with my mother's other jewelry in her safe deposite box at the bank at Florence. It was my most precious possession, a holy relic to me, and I dared not take it into the service with me, fearful of the risk of losing it. Later, years later after the war, I had gone With my mother to the bank to get a broach for my sister to wear at her wedding, and I caught one hasty glimpse of it lying like a dying heart on its casket of purple velvet. Even then, years, aeons after, it had set me a tremble, and I could not bring myslf to touch it. It remains there to this day.

No sooner had I completed seven weeks boot training in San Diego, California, then Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese, and the United States mus-
roomed into a full scale war. Without furlough, I was shipped overseas immediately, to New Zealand then to Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands. I was placed in the intelligence section, or R-2 section along with ten

other regimental scouts, selected for my talent as a quick sketch artist and my earlier training at scout and sniper school at Camp Pendleton and military mapping at Camp Elliott.

Surprisingly, I liked the Marines, the spit and polish, the roughness, which were akin to the roughness to which I had been accustomed all my life. I was adaptable, I was still very young, only seventeen, and the change from the old, boresome life in Rankin County, Mississippi, since I lost Luther was like a tonic. My mother wrote me long, descriptive letters, keying me in on all the local news, and there were letters from my kid brother and my sister to keep me company, to take me back again and again, if only in memory. There were none from Luther, nor his parents. He might as well have been on Mars.

On Guadalcanal, I became friends with a boy, who I later learned was from Houston, Texas, whom I shall call Cisco. He was an outstanding baseball player in that time and to use his true name would have revealed to the public eye an image of himself he would not have had revealed. Like the other scouts in the B-2 section, he excelled in on required talent, that of weapons expert. As well as baseball in civilian life, he had taken up skeet shooting and had become a marksman. Too, he was good with the bow and arrow and at swimming and diving. His young body was the personification of those talents. He was dexterous vigorously alive and healthy, and full of humor and a natural good-naturedness which won him many friends and few enemies – those few, the envious, the jealous.

Like the other eight boys in the section, we were luckily teamed together as buddy scouts, the Marines called them, to train together and later to go on patrols together as a working team. Our professional duties, the primary duties for which we had been trained, were to make hasty sketches of Japanese gun implacements, to locate their bivouacs, their hospitals, their battalions, to draw maps of our findings, to take prisoners if necessary (we had a Japanese language man in our section) to go, sometimes, on five man patrols, intelligence patrols, never combat patrols (that was for line companies), to seek out any information which would prove

vital, and to assist in furthering the success of the marines operations. It was enjoyable work, which I liked immensely, primarily because I did the drawings myself, and it gave me a limitless opportunity to be in the company of Cisco.

He liked me from the start, always teasing me, rumpling my thick dark hair, tusseling with me, pinching me playfully on the ass. He was possessed with that spontaneous wilfullness which beguiled one out of his moods, his moments of depression (which all marines had at times). There was little sadness when he was around. That he was a little cocky and sure of himself never bothered me, for I blamed it on his earlier baseball time, but had I been more perceptive at the time I would have seen and understood the falseness, the devil may care attitude of his wayward personality.

We were bivouacked in the coconut grove beyond the first outlying stretch of beach on Guadalcanal, with our dark green tents staked between the rows and rows of coconut palms, and with six men to each tent, dirt floors, candles for light at night, and a central latticed rack for showering and latrines. Life was peaceful enough, except for frequent Japanese air attacks – attacks to avenge the young son of the Emperor, who was killed in the initial stages of the invasion of Guadalcanal by the Marines. A screen and a movie protector was set up in the grove, with prone coconut logs for seats, and there were movies nightly. Usually they were about the war, or were highly outdated, the marines having already seen most of them in civilian life, but the logs were always crowded those beautiful starry nights – the most breathtaking starry nights I have ever seen – and the shows were applauded, scoffed, booed, or whistled at, according to the feature.

It was on one of these such nights that I, not going to the grove to see the movie because of dark clouds coming in low from ocean winds threatening rain, with my writing materials on my lap, and a candle on a make shift desk constructed from ammunition crates, sat on my bunk in my shorts writing a letter home. had received a pressed flower from my mother in one of her recent letters, one of the first of spring she had informed, and it had drowned me in a state of melancholy. The mere sight of it folded in a sheet of vellom

heralding those emerald alcoves and those densely shaded beds radiant with smell and blossom. There are no springs on earth more beautiful than southern springs. And I had been brought up in that realm of intense beauty. It had soaked into my blood streams, had become as much a part of me and my personality as had the ante-bellum house where I had romped and played, had multiplied my sense of artistic beauty and bauty in relation to my art.

The ocean winds drove across the island in one steady sweep, lifting the tent flaps ghost like and swaying the giant coconut palms with reckless abandon, their black shape slike Spanish fans trembling in front of the beautiful faces of Spanish dons, like feathered dancers moving in some pagan festivity. At intervals, the lighted candle before me would tremble, threaten to go out, a veil of smoke curling into the darkness of the tent, then it would light up again, defying the night, the darkness, the storm. And I would resume my writing. With the exception of myself, the tent was empty, the others attending the movie, the mosquito enshrouded bunks like draped caskets waiting corpses.

Cisco entered under the weather flap of the tent, a smile on his face so broad it would have melted a tyrant, his green eyes glowing like a tiny animals from the weak candle light.

"Not going to the show, Bambino,?" he asked loudly, coming around the center pole and sitting down on the bunk beside me. He always referred to me as Bambino, or his little Bambino, which I was later to discover meant, "his little baby."

"I'm writing mama," I replied, a little annoyed that he had disturbed me, and the letter only partially finished. I folded the stationery pack and placed it in my improvised desk.

"Go ahead and finish your letter," he said mannerly, though I could tell he wanted company to talk to." I was just bumming around, can't stand to see the move again. Saw it twice before I left home."

"What is playing?" I asked, thought really not interested.

"Something with George Raft, probation, liquor, mobs, you know the kind," he said, his Texan drawl ebbing in his lack of interest in the film. "You see one you've

seen them all."

I nodded. I threw my naked legs over him and stretched out on the bunk. I could feel the warmth of his ass against my thighs. We had stood out on an open field in the hot sun all that day, in full dress and marching pack, awaiting the arrival of Mrs. Roosevelt, who never arrived. My body ached from the heavy pack and tight straps over and under my arms. Several marines had fainted from the fierce heat, collapsing while standing in rank, and a number of them had dropped out, seekmg shade in the hospital jeeps.

"Tired, too, I see," he commented drowsily, leaning back and slapping me lightly on the naked leg. "Why do people like her gave to go tramping around when there is a war to fight. We've got enough troubles as it is, without some woman assing it around all over the world."

"To boost the morale of the boys in green," I kidded, though I agreed with him. Her expected visit had caused pandemonium in the entire grove, with cleaning details, policing up camp, with showers draped off, with pissing latrines (a staff of hollow bamboo thrust into the ground) censored by stakes overlayed with a strip of tent canvas.

"My morale sure needs boosting," he said dryly, his dark head tilted. "If they're going to send a woman at least they could send us a purty one, Betty Grable – somebody like that. Sure could use a woman, Bambino – sure could use a woman!"

He laughed softly, started tickling me under the arm. He pinched me on the tit.

The wind suddenly blew the candle out. We were enshrouded in instant darkness. The heavens, those watching Gods on Mount Olympia, were turning into mach makers. The elementes were in my defense.

Cisco bent over me and kissed me full upon the lips. Like Norman, like Maurice, so like Luther (oh, Luther, how can I do this to you?), he was embarking on another game for me to play, for me to star in, until its expected ending. No one had touched me, nor even tried, since Luther had touched me that fatal night at the lodge – aeons and aeons ago now, it seemed to me. Or had it ever really happened? I had sworm then that no one, man nor woman, would touch me, kiss me, nor

have me.

Now this famous baseball star, this hero from that other glorious world, was kissing me, kissing me again and again, and I was not trying to stop him. Oddly, I was liking it.

He lifted his face momentarily, and even in the darkness his eyes shone, the outline of his features distinguishable, as a semblance of a glow showed on the far horizon, a blue glow which illuminated the army of tents, like pyramids.

"I know a place we can go," he whispered lowly, his lips just above mine. "It's safer there."

Automatically, I rose from the bunk and followed him, swept up into this apathy of passions and of something more self imposed, more determined than my oath to Luther, my new glorious principle of life.

He took me down into a deep hollow at the edge of camp, a cone shaped depression interlaced with a thick growth of vines and short, thickly limbed shrubbery. We got on our hands and knees and, guided by a narrow trail, crawled for a timeless time upwards, and underneath the obstacles of vine and limb to a wallowed out place near an outcropping of stones.

Had he previsioned this rendeveous with me? Had he preordained a future tryst with me, and in ordaining its coming, hastened to make a safe haven for us, to discover beforehand our love bed?

It was sheere lunacy!

Jap patrols, and Jap stragglers patrolled these areas at night, venturing in as close to camp as possible to spy on marine activities, at times even braving the Marine galleys in search of food and drink. And even Marine guards, patrolling these border line shores, were schooled to shoot first then ask questions later.

Yet, unwary of our immediate danger, even to the point of risking our lives, we lay down on the padded carpet of leaves, leaves I suspected he had pulled earlier in the daytime and placed there, and, stripping off my shorts, he turned me over on my stomach and took me.

My mind was so overwrought with the memory of Luther, and of guilt, of shame, that I hardly took notice of Cisco's body on top of mine, nor felt but a dull awakening of pain as he took me, making me a part of him.

That I was breaking my promise at last to Luther, filled me with a deep sadness, and no sooner than Cisco finished with me, I lay meekly and began to sob. He mistook my tears for him and, turning me to him, his naked body pressed to mine, he kissed me again and again. I allowed him to love me, though I took no part in the love making myself, for now I had tarnished Luther's and my love, and whatever Cisco did to me now, or in the future would not matter. Yet, I thought of Luther on that other slope of life, relived our life together again, mending, with my mind, the pieces of our love which I had shattered.

Cisco had me often during those times on Guadalcanal, almost nightly, the little alcove beneath the bramble of limbes and leaves our momentary home. One, with our hearts in our throats, we lay deathless still when a Jap patrol, coming so near I could have reached out and touched their boots, slipped their way through the undergrowth, then skirted the grove. It was on one of those brightly moonlit tropical nights, and through the entanglement of limb and vine I could distinguish their figures clearly. The light ocean breeze drove their scent toward me and I smelled, for the first time, the smell of the enemy, the smell of the Japanese race. That smell would follow me all the days of my life, a smell that was not rancid, not of sweat and filth, but of the true smell of their race, an oddor which was a little sweat, the faint essence of talcum or perfume. To this day I can recognize that odor. And only recently, years and years after World War II was fought and won, I was in Rosenfields selecting gifts for my neice for Easter when a woman, an elegantly dressed woman came close to the ounter where I stood and that same odor, identical to that of the Japanese, floated my way, and it brought on instantly the sharp memory of war, the Japs, the fighting in the Pacific.

After our first encounter with sex, Cisco dogged my tracks, brought me candy bars from the PX, green coconuts to drink and occasionally a coke, or fried chicken or cake stolen from the officers galley. He was never rough with me but once and that was when he caught me taking a shower one afternoon in the presence of a group of other Marines who had just come in after

a patrol.

"I do not want them to see your body," he said roughly, slapping me so hard across the mouth I was completely stunned, the impact of his insane jealousy frightening me a little. After that, I always went to the showers after dark when usually there were no other Marines present. Later, after several days of brooding, he kissed where he had slapped me, and called me Bambino many times. Morosely, I forgave him, flattered somewhat that he coveted my body and cared enough to no want exposed to the eyes of the other Marines. But the terrible injustice he did to me later dominated all the essence of his own body on mine, his love making, his petty names.

I thought our secret life, particularly from his point of view, more than from mine, since his future as an athlete in the civilian world lay at stake. The possibility of disgrace before his fellow Marines, or a scandalous dishonorable discharge for us both, silencing his tongue to inevitable muteness. But, one intensely dark evening, on returning from the shower, I was to discover how cruel others can be and yet mean nothing by that cruelty.

I had to towel wrapped about me and was plodding along between the tent stakes on wooden soled sandals my kid brother had sent me from home, and I was about to enter my tent when the entire R-2 section of scouts closed about me. My heart leaped to my throat as I saw in their eyes naked lust and complete damnation. It was on a Saturday night when the PX was opened for the rationing out of beer, and from the looks of them they had either bartered or stolen more than their share.

Several of them grabbed me roughly by the arms and half dragged, half carried me to that hollow impression outside camp which was camofladged with vine and leaf. The same place Cisco had maneuvered me two months before. They jerked off my towel, knocked me down, then took turns with me. They showed no mercy, and it was utter useless to cry out for help, to scream. And there was no use to hope that someone would come to my aid. For no one knew and no one cared.

In my Pain, I cried silently for Luther, muffling my sobs in the dark leaves beneath me. I was so small, only

five feet in height and weighing only one hundred and twenty pounds that I could not fight back. One of them could have whipped me, let alone the entire mob. Their hovering bodies, watching tensely as one of them attacked me, was like the dark bulb of apes against the skyline, then another, then another until their lusts had been quenched. Whenever I tried to rise, a fist dove me back into the leaves, or I was shaken until my teeth rattled, or slapped in the face, across the eyes, my nose, my forehead. I was numb with sharp pain, and the fright, that terrifying fright as one got off and another climbed on – the fright, the terror of that cruelty, that utter lack of regard the next one would employ, almost sent me into convulsions.

There was one of them, a huge bull faced boy, a giant almost, and obviously a former football player, with his shock head, his bulldog neck and overweight body, who tried purposely to harm me physically with his merciless display of sex. To prove, while being crude with me, that he was sexually virile, and to impress the other with his manhood. He weighed over two hundred pounds, and his massive shoulders and arms towered over my head, burying my body in the leaves, in the sharp stones which bore into my stomach and legs. The pain was so intense, so constant, I felt I was going to be paralyzed, my legs going numb. Sweat dripped from my forehead and my lips and tongue became so dry, so wiped of all moisture, like they were racked with fever.

The smell of sweat, of beer on their breaths, of the masculine scent of their sex driven bodies, was rampant, invading my world, Luther's and my world, telescoping my terror, sinking my body and my mind into the realm of their depravity.

One of the boys, the last in line so to speak, had so much coarse black hair on his body, (I remembered him from the showers earlier), that he looked like an ape, the thick matting chafing me like thorns.

When they were through with me, and how long was that time it took for all of them to rape me, I will never know. They vanished up the incline and back to camp, one of them booting me in the ass as he leaped over my body and followed after the others, and they left me there, soiled, degraded, tarnished now beyond all recognition of purity. They left me for the Japs, if the Japs

should want me, to stumble upon me there in the darkness and kill me if necessary.

I lay in the pool of my own pain, sobbing silently, robbed now of all hope, of all strength to rise and return to that orderly world which was spoiled for me now.

I lay drowsily, hoping, wishing that I would die here, that the guards would discover me on the morning and the marines who had mutiliated me punished for their crimes. Dully, I wanted revenge. I wanted to lash out at fate, which had ruined me so unfairly, wanted to strike quick and draw blood.

Then, someone was bending over me. I could feel their physical presence, their hand which came to rest on my arm. Suddenly I froze. Wat it a Jap? I was afraid to raise my head and look.

"Baby," came a low, moanful whisper, and I knew it was Cisco.

I tried to get up, but couldn't. I fell back on the hard pressed leaves.

"What in the hell have they done to you?" he cried in a low, flat voice, bending over me, stroking my hair which was wet with sweat, and with dew of that early, tragic, Sunday morning.

At those words, those shaky meaningful words, though my own senses was so dulled I barely heard them, I realized the betrayal behind them.

"So you told them," I spat hatefully, defending my and Luther's world, my own conscience.

He breathed heavily.

"Only Hugh – I only told Hugh," he said apologetic, the sound of his voice far off, wandering, then coming back again in some kind of old, treacherous terror.

"The biggest mouth in the section," I defended, remembering swiftly how much I disliked Hugh Rushing, mainly because, like me, he was a southerner from Mobile, Alabama. I thought that because of this, he and I could have gotten on well together, but he had never tried to like me, referring to me as red-neck, or worse, Mississippi mud-cat.

Cisco wrapped a poncho around my nakedness, it was as yet dawn, and lifted me to my feet. He took me to the showers and bathed my body as the cold, wind driven water caressed me, soothed my aching shoulders my ass, my bruised face and arms.

I thought of Shakespeare. "All the water in Neptune's ocean cannot wash the stains from my hands – though I said "body" in my mind.

Cisco tucked me into my bunk, careful that the mosquito netting was draped properly, then got into his, which was next to mine. The next day, I was so sore, so blue with bruises, with flesh cust I could hardly move, but when I did get up I was met with sheepish looks from the boys in my section who had used me, who had taken part in their so called orgy the night before. Behind those guilty faces, I saw something else which frightened me. I saw a coldness, a glitter in their eyes, that of determination, that somehow, I was their property to do with as they pleased, and I knew crazily that the night before was only a forerunner of what was to take place for me in the future.

From that fatal Sunday on, I was taken by some of them almost nightly. Sometimes two, three, and as many as four would come to me, singularly now of course, and lay with me, frequently down in the hollow alcove, then in my bunk, while the company was at a movie, then bravely, even while others remained in the tent. Whenver and wherever they choose, I was theirs somehow, but never really, to be had for their pleasures alone, then to be forgotten until their lusts again became aggressive.

Had they been more polite, had they taken the time to beguile me, talk to me, to even court me, then their taking me would have been less forceful, would have been less crude and malicious. But they never said a word to me, nor let it be known before the eyes of the camp that they even knew me except during times of absolute necessity, whenever they were forced to converse with me in the line of duty.

My life was miserable. Where the other Marines had only one enemy, the Japanese, I had two – that band of Marines in my section who silently unerringly attacked me, or raped me, for that was actually what it was. Invading my world, my privacy, my rights as a citizen, as absolutely as the Japanese who threatened my way of life. I was defenseless. At least with the Japanese, I had the supreme right to kill them, to destroy them anyway I saw fit. With my other enemy I was helpless. My body, nor my soul no longer belonged to me. Unwilling-

ly, I had surrendered to them. I was their captor. I was bound as if on druidical altars. In fact, I was bound – bound by their lusts, the fetted calf whose warm blood they drank, the blood which was my body, the blood which was my soul, my spirit. My spirit, they drank too, for once I was proud, tempermental.

Possessed with a hair-triggered temper, a bit haughty, but now all my defenses were down. I had lost all my respect – respect for my self, when once I had been so proud of my continuence, my respect for them, for all mankind.

A temple stormed is a thing spoiled in the taking.

The temple that was my body, had become a house of ruse, of fornication, a door with neither lock nor key, for I was always open to them, the sanctum of my body becoming the house of their lusts.

I knew now that, had Luther learned about me, he would no longer want me. That was spoiled for me too. I would and could not ever find my way back to him now.

In my nightmare, that nightmare which had become my life, my world, I became affected, not only physically but also in mind – yet mentally more I think than physically. I could no more be taken by them nightly and not become affected, than I could walk through a rainstorm and not get wet. Those rituals, those orgies, all of which I loathed, being taken in the tent while other Marines looked on, gave me somewhat of an inferiority complex – a complex which has affected me to this day. My sense of kindness to others, my sincere regard for others wants, their wishes, stems not from my good-heartedness, but from the memory of those hard, deprived times when I was in the R-2 section on Guadalcanal and was the constant featureless victim to those nine rapists. Their ruthlessness provoked within me a posthumous birth. The of spring of their rape, their incessant attitutes toward me, their lack of regard for me as a human being – except sometimes, they became vaguely tender in their moments of passion – has now grown into a full grown .giant. This is my only trophy from World War II.

I can sympathize with prostitutes, for I can understand wholly how their lives have become affected over that long duration of plying their trade. How, night after

night, their bodies join with the savageness of lucidity, and how that victimizing can produce within them an inferior complex toward life – toward all men.

Yet, unlike the prostitute, who ply their trades willingly, on a business-like basis, willingly, cooperating to the ultimate, my relations with these base Marines was forced. They merely took me because I was not large enough nor strong enough to fight back, because, due to their threats that they would kill me once on the battlefield if I reported them to the company commander, I complied. I could do only one thing sensibly – to let them have me whenever they wished, and to accept my fate with a little emotion as my wits and my intelligence would allow.

Whenever my mosquito net was lifted and one of them climbed into the bunk with me, whenever I was instructed to go down to the hollow alcove and wait, I complied with immunity to their doings, I came in time, to seperate my body from my mind, to think of other things while their hard bodies drove into my rebellious body, while their sperm flowed through me like a half forgotten dream.

They robbed me of my child's heart and inflicted me, with their coarseness, their rudeness, a rebellion against all men. They were showing to me the base, the savageness, the opposite counterpart to the male gender. And they were doing it in such times of unrest, of anxiety, of fears gone rampant, that their actions multiplied their unjust within my nature. I will always link sex with war. I will always regard men with a sense of awe, linking them with violence, with filth, with lust.

That there was a tender side of their natures, I seriously doubted. Not the tenderness that was Luther, not the consideration, the loving concept of his hands, his warm body on mine. Perhaps, they expressed such tenderness with their women, but here in the Marines, on this hated Pacific Island, they were ruthless because they gloried in such ruthlessness. That fate should will me as their victim was the most unjust thing on earth.

Cisco learned early on his mistake. Where once he had slapped me for taking a shower with other marines, he now had to sit at times in the tent and witness some of his buddies having sex with me. The regret of his loose tongue showed plainly on his face and, to obliterate

that look, that feeling of guilt, he began to take me as the others, with no kidding in between, no stolen kisses, no light jokes as before.

But I was saved, mercifully, by a boy from Ohio who had joined the section since the other scouts had gang-raped me, and the huge bull shaped boy was moved out of th tent and the section, transferred to communi-cations, and this boy – Myrka by name, moved in and occupied the bunk directly across from mine.

CHAPTER 5

I liked Myrka from the first, mainly because he was small in statue like me and he was ignorant of the others relations with me. And liking him, I harbored the one hope that the others would not tell him of their liberties.

He was a curly headed blond, with finely chiseled features, tiny, pink rosebud mouth, and soft blue eyes. He was so dainty in his cleanliness, so immaculate of body, had he not been so obviously masculine it would have been regarded as the rankest of femininity. But he was all boy and his strict, disciplined rearing on a farm in Ohio, made of him a perfect Marine and, thankfully for me, a much needed companion. We went to movies together, to the PX, swam in Lunga river, on the beach, played baseball, and spent literally hours talking and comparing notes about our civilian life, our aspirations, our dreams.

In time this dainty person became my shield. His constant presence placed the others at varience, and made it difficult for them to draw me out and use me as they had so lavishly done during the past. It annoyed them no end, even Cisco, who cut Myrka whenever an opportunity presented itself, and who went out of their way to be rude to him. This new reign of rudeness kept me in fear that they would tell Myrka about me, that they would in time spoil this fine, wholesome friendship Myrka and I shared, and which would place me back into that category they preferred.

Whenever they could, they would inevitablly slip an insulting remark about me when in his presence. The term queer sprank up too often during conversations, and names such as fairy, fruit, and Jopodada (the Japanese term for homosexual) were often strung out through discussions and brought up during the most unexpected provocations.

Too, they began to pin names on me – little black creole, half-nigger, southern white trash, red neck, any such name which sounded degrading in the presence of Myrka, trying to street him away from me, any term which called attention to my dark skin, my thick dark hair – all because my forefathers were Italian.

These new titles went over Myrka's head seemingly, and he appeared so innocent of life, of sex, of the world,

I was certain he was ignorant that such things existed, that men actually went to bed together, had sex, were labelled in society.

Yet, that impression of him was short lived.

One night when I lay wearily in my bunk, the tent vacant, the others attending a movie or on guard duty, I felt my mosquito net being eased from beneath my striped ticked mattress. I could smell a familiar odor, that of a tobacco pipe and, turning, saw Myrka easing into the bunk beside me. I loved that odor about him, remembering, after he had showered and dressed in clean kahki, with white socks and Indian mocassins, would sit on his bunk smoking his pipe, the sweet honey dipped aroma invading the dark tent. He smelled that way now and I was beguiled by the essence of it, by his clean, immaculate, utterly blond naked body next to mine.

He whispered softly:

"If the others can do it, then so can I."

It startled me. So they had told him after all! Vaguely, I felt that I had lost him, had been robbed of that fine wholesome friendship he and I shared together. He would become but one of them now, one more groping set of hands in the darkness, one more indistinguishable body roughly playing out a role, one more provoking pain on top of pain. But I was in for a surprise.

His hand slid down my naked stomach, through my pubic hair, and around me. No one had ever touch me there before, with the exception of Maurice during that long half forgotten time on the banks of Pearl River. Even Luther, folding his warm hands over my body had let his hands fondle me only to the tip of my pubic hair and no further.

Then, with his mouth parted, Myrka eased down my body, his wet lips making a trail down my body like the silvery trail of a snail. I felt excitedly alive, vitally alive, glorified by the touch, the strange anarchy of his love making. Uncontrollably, my body lifted and lowered with the wild rhythm of his lips, my every ounce of energy, my energy being siphoned through my veins. I could not hold back. There was a great shuddering in my loins. My body went limp. I breathed like a madman.

He eased his body up and beside mine and placed His face on my chest, his blond curly hair in the hollow of my neck. We lay for a moment in silence. I was puzzled. I had enjoyed him immensely, the thrill of it, th like of which I had never known.

"Is that the way you like it?" he finally asked, breaking the silence. ,

I became more puzzled. They had told him, but had twisted the truth somehow, I realized immediately. Dirty trick on Myrka. This aimless, ignorant boy had misinterpreted their report, or, they had lied to him deliberately.

"You do not have to do this to me," I tried to assure him, knowing full well that he had never done such a thing, nor even thought it, in all his life.

"But I want to, if you want me to," he came back sadly, and there was silence again. He remained in my bunk until almost dawn, then he eased out and slipped into his.

The others, in trying to trick Myrka, tricked themselves instead. Myrka and I became inseparable. They receeded into the borderline of my world, even Cisco, who looked at me with terrible longing and who, like the others, saw and felt the defeat of his deception. Occasionally he loved me, as did the others, for I had no weapon of defense to stop them. A hand in th darkness on my ass, along my inner thighs set the gory stage, and there were nights when I did not actually know which on of them it was who was grounding out his passion in robbing me of my own. Being immune to their crudeness, I had never taken the time, nor did I possess the inclination, to cull out their individual differences, to distinguish their approach, the manner in which they mounted me, the characteristic of their climax. Had I been interested in them, had I liked them, like I had with Luther, I would have known of their most intimate and minute differences, would have known them acutely. I had known Luther so well, the glory of his love making. But these bodies were but bodies, dark forms in a still greater darkness, void of individuality, void of the fire, the meteorites flame to set my senses stirring.

Myrka, my shield and my ease from sorrow, from terror, became the tonic which kept me from going mad

during those hectic times on the wind driven island of Guadalcanal. We were constantly together, talking and laughing, getting wolf calls when we ventured down the dusty roads of camp (we always wore kahki trousers cut off and cuffed at our thighs and raider boots with white socks) and whenever I lay down at night to rest he loved me.

Once the company gave a stage show, consisting of a small musical band of homemade instruments, a dancer, a comedian, and the boys in the section wanted me to dress up like a woman — to dress like Carmen Miranda and do I sexy dance. I flatly refused. I suppose, and I will think of this later, they did in a way regard me as a girl, these over abundantly healthy boys, overly sexed, with me so small of body, so petit in contrast to their ruggedness. But I could not bring myself to play out such a role, even to this day, for I was masculine and I could not then, and still cannot, manuever the gestures, the gimmicks of the female.

After much insistence, Myrka accepted and, losing my popularity momentarily – if it could be called popularity – I was fearful they may turn to him and take him sexually as they had with me. Myrka was so frail, so dainty at times, so trusting, but he proved that dynamite comes in small packages one night soon before Christmas.

I was sitting on my bunk wriing a letter home. My mother had sent me a clipping from the daily news about Luther, and those dark letters against that white paper, but so small a parcel in my hands, had opened up the past for me and I was once again in those emerald bridle trails and at the lodge at Hoover Lake. He had received the Atlantic, Pacific and Mediterranean War Zone bars, and I sat gloating over his success. Myrka slept in his bunk next to mine, his easy, regular breathing in cadence, it seemed to me, to the slight breeze which lay softly upon the night.

I looked up unconsciously from the tiny scrap of paper in my hands, a paper which had reached out across the thousands of miles of water and brought back Luther to me, and saw the huge, giant hulk of the Marine who had treated me so inhumanly the night of the rape standing gazing at me from the unfolded tent flap.

"What do you want?" I asked flatly, embittered that

so hideous a creature had stomped into mine and Luther's world, sending Luther back into those Mediterranan seas, on the other slope of the earth, opening my mind to the present – the hectic surroundings.

"The usual," he said mockingly, smiling a deep smile which showed strong white teeth evenly set in two pearly white rows. He was too healthy, I thought despairingly. Like the jersey bulls in my father's pasture.

"What is your usual?" I lashed back, a little more brave with Myrka in the same tent, a fact, obviously, the huge bulk of a Marine had not noticed. If I had to fight to my death, to conquer only by being conquered, I could not endure another session with him – with his huge elephant body ripping out my insides.

"You," he said sarcastically, coming into the tent. I stood up. I was beginning to tremble. He slapped the stationery from my hand. The letter and sheets of paper scattered in the darkness. The clipping from the paper fluttered aimlessly and disappeared under one of the bunks.

"Get your pants off," he commanded gruffly. "I got a Christmas present for you." He rubbed his crotch. His laugh was menacing, filled with the tremor of his passion.

He would never frighten me again, like lightning, I struck him squarely on the nose. It came to him as a surprise. He drew back momentarily, then lunged toward me.

Like a small fury, Myrka leaped from the bunk, the mosquito netting in billowing green clouds behind him. Reaching for his field pack which hung on a nail drive into the center pole, he withdrew his bayonet and, with on quick thrust, the blade shining for an instant in the yellow glow of the lighted candle, jabbed the marine in the stomach.

A slit of red oozed from the marine's kahki shirt, then blossomed into a crimson flower. Turning swiftly, his face twisted in a horrible monster-like frown, he fled from the tent.

Afterwards, and I will always look back in admiration, at small, petit Myrka, with shining sword in hand, defending me, driving off my enemies in that hostile, deprived world, and of the affect it had on the others.

We were let alone, though we were called degrading names, were scoffed, were ostrasized, but we did not care. We were liked by our commanding officer, a gallant, field commissioned officer whose name was Yaknow, a Polock from from the wheat belt, and one of the finest, most courageous men I have ever known.

Christmas came, a bit sad surely that year, but never the less pregnated with much activity, and the other marines in the section stayed too busy to molest us, or, too resigned to really care.

Six quart bottles of beer were alotted each marine that Christmas Eve and, since Myrka nor I drank, we gave ours to Cisco. He really pitched one. But so did the rest of camp. The coconut grove was in an uproar, many of the marines getting drunk off of apple jack or fumigated fruit juices and coconut milk.

I sat in my tent with my forty-five pistol in my lap, remembering that night of the rape when the marines in my section had dragged me down the hill, the memory of that fright, of that pain, drove on my every nerve, :and the faint sounds of the boys whooping and holleraround the PX sent tremors through me. Had they been natives dancing around a campfire, thumping drums in lieu of my death, I would not have been more terrorized.

That I was so small, so helpless, that there was no one in all the world to halt those scavangers of sex, tightened every vein, made me go mad at the possibility – the possibility of enduring such a night as I had endured weeks before.

I made Myrka remain in the tent with mc, though he understood nothing of my caution, knew nothing of my past holocaust of pain. His small golden face strangely lit with that faint glow which radiates and preordains doom.

This was to be the most terrifying night of my life, including those awesome nights which were to follow in actual combat, of Jap attacks, and deprivation and death. The worst too for Myrka, though he, unlike me, was innocent of the pains, the remembrance of them, which is a double terror.

They came upon us unawares, closing in and through every opening in the tent, my pistol twisted out of my palm before I had a chance to use it. Giggling foolishly,

like a swarm of drunken clowns, hysterical in their rampant march of sex, they smothered Myrka and me with their clawing hands, their reckless determination, their primeval acuteness of motive – to drag us down and rape us – and playfully, though in that play merciless, violent – the most awsome of all violence.

The rape of a woman, it she is not killed in the attempt, has its salvation. Her wound is flexible. If she is wise and consents to rape no harm is actually done to her physically. But a male – to rape a male!

The anatomy of the male is not flexible. It is a simple process of unendable pain for one, glory for the other.

As we were dragged bodily from the tent, with Myrka giving out muffled, terrifying sobs, their strong, steel like hands cupped over his mouth, over mine, I realized what was in store for us. I almost fainted at the knowledge.

We were taken to the shower racks, which, since the expected visit of Mrs. Roosvelt, then rim of the concrete flooring had been walled, and but on side and the roofless top was exposed. Here, on that hard, wet concrete, they threw us, tore off our clothes, and the maddening orgy began.

Twice that I know of, I fainted. The hot pain too monstrous to be borne. Bodies, naked bodies, the stench of beer breaths, the smell of sweet, suffocating hair and body lotions mingled with sweat, of male essence, the odors of tobacco swarmed within the shower enclosure, and was heightened, was underscored by muffled groans, satisfied groans, of struggle, as those sexually anxious to indulge my or Myrka's bodies, awaited their turn. Dark bodies, hairy bodies, smooth bodies small bodies, huge bodies, as in some hideous nightmare, pulled at me, drove into me, legs kicking, arms coiling, tightening, relaxing, announcing only the accommodation of another body, a fresh, eager body, clamorous with perhaps, sometimes, bolder, more savage action.

I could hear Myrka's anxiety to scream and, turning Under the weight of my assailant, I tried to look at him. His tiny body was all but submerged by a thickly mus-Cled marine who lay on top of him, his thighs taking On the rhythmic cadence of a savage dance. Though I was wracked with pain, my every nerve pulling taut

each time my partner (how could I ever call him a partner?) thrust homeward, my heart went out to Myrka, and something in me died a little – some monstrous pity for him awakening the darkest places within me. Each time one marine slid drunkenly off him and another one got on, as it was with me, a new struggle began, of flinching muscles, of being struck by careless fists if you struggled defense took too long, then to accept – always forced to accept.

The pain that Myrka was bearing, more intense perhaps than I, for I was more experienced, my soul winched, and a kind of hysterical madness assailed me. I moaned. I slobbered on the cold concrete. I strained every tendon in my body to wrest myself and go to his aid, even at the risk of being struck, as I repeatedly was, on the head, on the ncck, my forehead, my face. Then, out of the melee of naked bodies another kind of struggle ensued. Someone was pulling the body from off me. Every nerve, it seemed in that one instant, every fire hot nerve, was strung through my body and out with it. Rising quickly, or attempting to rise, for I was kicked across the mouth, I saw Cisco battling with the boy who had been raping me. He, like the others, was uproariously drunk, but his hard, baseball fists were swinging wildly, accurately, and he let out animal groans when he was, in turn, belted in the groin, in the stomach, the face.

It broke up the orgy, that drunken, misfitted orgy – or orgy as I termed it. Actually, such a manifestation of sex could not have been called an orgy. It was really, mutiliated, multiple rape, with a score of boys, perhaps twenty more or less, with but two victims – Myrka and me.

The battle of sex, of lust, of rape – though some of them had considered only one more playfully drunken night, with no harm done switched quickly to fighting, and immediately the shower was vacated as fist fights broke out in pairs, and in groups.

I dragged myself to where Myrka lay sobbing. There was blood on his face, on his chest, his arms that twitched nervously. Taking all the strength that was left in my body, I lifted him up into my arms and walked him, half dragged him to our tent and lay him on his back. Though I was steaming with pain, I wet a towel

and wiped his face, tried to hush his sobs, but he kept on, sobs alternating to hysterics, then to a full rush of tears which streamed down his face, then lifting trembling hands to cover his eyes as though in shame.

"Oh, Rex, what are we going to do?" he cried again and again, his small, beautiful body, with its moonlit glow, shaking. "What is going to happen to us?"

Seeing him in this state, seeing ultimately both our helplessness in this defenseless world, this living hell, I resolved to make a report.

"Tomorrow – tomorrow, Myrka, I am going to Captain Yaknow," I said reassuringly, patting his hair. I knew we could not go on like this, to exist in such an anarchy, while around us, respectfully, it was bad enough, with the war raging all over the globe, with Japs in every bush, with aerial attacks, and patrols, and coming operations on other Jap held islands in the Pacific.

This was a mad, hostile world, and we – Myrka and I – were its sole victims. There was no escape for us. It was as lawless as if we were in some savage wilderness.

I looked down at him, so small, so golden, and I thought him like a child, a frightened child with no one to comfort him, to beguile him out of his fears. His body trembled, as from rigor mortus, and I knew the pains he was feeling, in feeling my own.

I went to my bunk and lay down and tried to sleep, but sleep was impossible. I tossed and turned, weighing in my mind the things I must do in the morning, regardless of self respect. Myrka was depending on me. I had to do something – something or the both of us.

Suddenly, a body fell across mine, a body torn with deep, animal sobs. It was Cisco. His curly head lay loosely upon my stomach, his hands sprawled awkwardly against my neck, my thighs. The tears rolled down his face, dripped onto me.

"I am sorry, I am sorry," he sobbed again and again, drunkenly.

I knew that he was.

I had no words of comfort for him. Indirectly, he had caused it all, had caused the pit of agony in which Myrka no wlay, had caused my own pains, the trembling terror that would always be with me.

Gutted with agony, I dosed. Then slept. Sometime in the night I turned, no longer felt the weight upon me, and I knew that Cisco was gone, but I did not care. Life would never be the same for me – nor for Myrka. The long road from home, that stately kingdom beneath the roof of moss, had ended in this awesome nightmare. And there would never be any going back to those leisurely, innocent good times again. The worst had happened to me, and my childhood dreams, and my worldly aspirations were left behind me.

The Rex Polo of that time – that long time ago, time of forever spring, was dead somehow, and this dark, tarnished, disgraced form was left to take his place. I was changed. The brutality of sex, of rape, had dug out that old, happy, carefree self, the plunder gorging out all the things I had loved, cherished – even Luther!

The savagery of the male, the ultimate of his coarse side, had done its deadly work on m. Man had robbed me of my God. I could not even call on him for help so deep was I in the endless pit of degradation. My God, my mother's and my father's God, had forsaken me.

It was foolish to cry out into the night, to call on God who, sometime so long ago, had dulled under the bright glow of anarchy. Had I created this Hell in which I now found myself I would have accepted it with no no other alternative, but I was guiltless, and I was trapped, my body but a thing without a heart nor soul, to be torn by the agony of lust – others lust, not my own.

I wanted to go home, home where I could lick my wounds and start all over again. There, with its comforts, I could rearm myself for the future, would be safe from these rapists, these drunken Gods who sought to have me, to destroy me. They could not reach me there. No harm could come to me under that lovely roof, with the love of my parents, like hovering wings, to protect me. Suddenly, I wanted my mother, to lay my head in her lap and cry out my heartbreak, to feel her kind hands my hair.

"Oh, God, help me," I cried, though He seemed a long way off, hidden from my plight." Help me and Myrka

– please!”

God answered my prayer. Way in the night, having fallen into a sound sleep, I was awakened by the sound of a far distant bugle.

It was a call to arms!

CHAPTER 6

We entered Empress August Bay on the island of Bougainville at dawn on the first of November, 1943, and for almost a month, lived – or existed – in a new kind of hell. But that campaign did me one good favor, both for me and for Myrka. It took us away from those marines in the R-2 section who had treated us so unmercilessly. We were scheduled to reach Bouganville by battleship, independently scheduled, as were the other scouts in the R-2 section, and momentarily our group was split up, dispersed until the campaign was over.

Never again would I be dragged down that wretched trail and into that emerald hollow and raped. God had spared me, had spared Myrka and, though the uncertainty of our lives was ever constant on that island of endless, steaming jungle, of mud (we landed in the monsoon season) of ticks, lice, lizards, head hunters, jungle rot – not to mention the enemy, the Japanese – we survived. These terrors were uncertainties. The rape of lust on Guadalcanal was a certainty.

Then, we were back again on Guadalcanal, but only for a short period of reconditioning, then to the island of Guam.

We, too, were split.

Each of the R-2 scouts was assigned to a line company and to go aboard an LST for the journey to that coral island which set like an emerald in those eternally blue pacific waters.

It was an irksome trip, taking around thirty days, and I was among complete strangers. I worked independently, my duty was to stay abreast of the attacking line company, to plot their advancements on a battle map and to connect to headquarters after the initial assault had been secured.

It was aboard this LST that I met Stanley Miller.

It was during the time of embarkation. I had secured a bunk for myself on the forward extremity of the ship (if it could be called a ship – more of a tub) and my first glimpse of him was when he came down the steps and into the hole. He was weighted with full marching pack, rifle, pistol, and all the other paraphernalia which a marine is entrusted. His helmet was off, swinging in one hand. His hair was a matt of intense

black, so were his eyes, like black muscadines, I thought as he stood directly above me on the stps. He stood out in the group who surrounded him, though they were attired in exactly the same thing in which he was attired, as princely as one of King Arthur's knights. He was one of those gifted persons of physical attraction who moves in an atmosphere all his own. In fact, he carried his atmosphere with him, and that atmosphere was like a luminous shield, a halo which radiated his strikingly good looks and undeniable charm.

I learned from him later, for I managed to jockey my position next to him near the railing one glorious sunset evening, that he was from New Jersey, an art student, so our relationship was quickly sealed. During that trip, we sought the other out daily, stationing ourselves near the same rail where first we met so that one would not chance to miss the other. Actually, I was free, with no marine duties, (he had occasional guard duty), so we stayed together almost constantly. The more I know about him, the more I linked him to the Kings of the old world, declaring to him openly that he resembled prince Valiant from the Sunday funnies. He liked that, for Stephan Foster was his favorite artist, though mine was Alex Raymond, creator of Flash Gordon, so our talks were endless.

Knowing him, or thinking I knew him, I thought Luther's impression of Yankees was untimely, for there was a manner about Stanley, unlike the pushy, beligerent northerners I had been used to since I joined the Marine Corps. There was breeding there, a hint of gentility, a far cry difference than th cruel, ill-mannered scouts of the R-2 section, with the exception of Myrka. Too, he was remarkably intelligent. I had not even finished high school and I learned much about the world from this marine who dominated my life from Guadalcanal to Guam. It was like a lecture tour.

That he sought me out, that he ignored his own fellow marines he was stationed with, called itself to my attention. I blamed his interest on the reality that we were both artists and had this much in common. The boys he had come aboard with, and who engaged him in short, hurried conversations from time to time, did not seem his type. This is to say, they had none of his

polish. They were a little crude, which befit what they were – rugged marines. All male, and rugged because of it.

I was aware that he had a nicely built body, as one is aware of a beautiful body on a girl as seen through her clothes. He had the lithe grace of an animal, the dexterity of his muscles, the way they slipped beneath his field tunic, advertising his huskiness, the firmness of his build beneath.

One emblazoned sunset evening, the last evening on the LTS before the invasion of Guam the following dawn, I was taking a shower. I realized it would be a long time, perhaps, before I would get another chance to bathe, so I took advantage of it, despite that the shower water was direct from the ocean and left one's body a little sticky from the salt.

The shower stall was not much larger than a telephone booth and was located at the brow of the ship, the water a continuous stream, fed in from the ocean, and pleasantly warm. There was no need to bother with soap, for soap would not lather in salt water. But I had brought after shave lotions and cologne along with me wrapped in a towel and having completed my shower, began to apply the tonic to my body. This sounds a little idiotic, since I was going no where except to a filthy battlefield, but such trival things heighten the morale, and pretense is half the doing.

Stanley walked in.

He was completely dressed in his field fatigues, with a glowing white towel over one shoulder, and the contrast of my naked body against his clothed one made me a little self conscious. I noticed that he gave a quick inventory of my nakedness with his dark, but glittering eyes.

"You sure smell good," he said after that first repose, attempting to make conversation. "Going to a ball?"

I nodded.

"The Japs are giving a celebration on Guam at dawn," I said readily, glad and feeling triumphant that he had noticed me. "They promise plenty of activity."

"Well, then, let me get ready for it." he laughed softly, unbuttoning his tunic. He slipped out of his clothes, taking off his pants, I notice, exactly as Luther had al-

ways taken his off, by hysting up one leg and pulling his pants leg from him, rather than lifting his legs out of the pants. I had always thought this gesture the height of masculinity and never tired of watching Luther do it. But Luther was gone from me now, perhaps gone forever, and here this noble person stood, stripping naked before me, displaying the full glory of his manhood like a statue being carefully undraped.

I had seen many marine naked since joining the service, in the shower stalls, for physical inspections, lying around on their bunks on Sundays, at work and at play, but this body fascinated me.

His flesh was luminous white, frothed with but scant black hair on his forearms and legs. He was not plump, far from it, but there was a smooth roundness to him, his thighs enormously huge, his biceps and wrists unusually thick, his neck short, his chest and shoulders magnificently broad, as a whole,g to him a certain thickness, a certain softness which is sometimes mistaken for plumpness. Yet, beneath that luminous whiteness of his skin, the hardness of his muscles showed through, rippled whenever he moved, the veins quickly popping up like strutted cords. To say the last, he was sexy, and provoked sex with me, a rarity in my life. Somewho, I wanted to be close to him, to feel and to know what thrilled him and to aid in that thrill. To merely know him as a friend was, suddenly at this moment, not enough. I had to know more, to be more, to exist as something vitally essential and important to him.

When he finished with his shower and had dried himself off, he asked to use some of my lotion, and I rubbed his back and shoulders with the scent while he covered his chest and mid section. Surprisingly, he did not alter his position when my hands went down his spine to his buttocks, and, even in that bit of surrendering he seemed, somehow, a little closer to me, that he needed me in some way. The idea that I could readily put my hands on this person, a person whose high ideals in life a person with such noble aspirations, awed me. The liberties I could take with him were as intoxicating as a sip of wine. Even when my hand went around his hips to his navel he did not flinch, nor sho wthe slightest sign of disapproval.

Later, we sat on an ammunition box within the waist high rim of a gun turret on the port side of the ship, with our towels draped around us, and stared out at the ocean. It was dark now, and the black waves, only faintly lit, loomed up in endless rows, soon to disappear in the distance. The Pacific is always calm, and the most romantic place on earth is on the open deck of a ship.

Occasionally, the night breeze lifted the towel about Stanley's thighs and I would get a glimpse of the dark nest of hair at his crotch, which he made on attempt to conceal. That he was baiting me with his body, I did not realize at the time, though on looking back I know that now. He was wanting sex with me and he was using the gentleman's touch, of letting me know he wanted me but in so slight a way as to place him in the role as to the innocent. Like in the shower, he was letting me touch his body, but in so natural away, in so casual a gesture, nothing could be made of it. As now, whenever the towel lifted to reveal – and I must say to reveal maddeningly – the hand that pressed it in place did it so quickly, and was brought back so unerringly it left me to believe that the towel was free to lift again at the slightest breeze – which it did.

"Do you believe in premonition?" he asked softly, breaking our long silence – we had those period of silence – as did every marine, staring at the water, gazing absently, preoccupied in our own private worlds, yet conscious of that friend, that buddy, and needing him beside us.

I answered that I had thought about it, though not really knowing whether I believe in it or not. Yet, I did believe in physic natures. In a way, I was physic myself, especially in the forerunner of danger.

"Why?" I asked, for he had said it sadly.

He 1ooked away at the dark ocean and the dark sky, as though he saw something out there except the elements of nature, changing, yet never changing.

"Oh – I was just thinking, I suppose, about tomorrow, what it will bring for the both of us."

"I guess all of us are thinking about tomorrow," I said, turning to look at the silhouettes of marines lining the rails on both sides of the LTS. We were to be in the

initial assault waves, going ashore the instant the ships bombardment and aerial attacks were lifted.

"I mean, about us," he corrected himself. "Do you suppose we will ever see each other again?"

His had not occurred to me until this instant, until he had put it into words, and I looked at him oddly, I suppose, really looked at him for the first time, and for the first time I realize that I wanted to see him.

"Do you want to se me again?" I asked bluntly, the evasive spirit never a part of my nature. Directness was my creed.

"Yes – I do," he answered, and his dark eyes found mine, their lights gleaming even in this monstrous cave of darkness." I want to very much. I like you and the people I like, I want close around me, do you understand what I mean?"

I answered that I did, remembering with a sad heart, my lost love for Luther. I had wanted him near me. In fact I had wanted to love Luther all my life.

"I want you – I mean I want you near me – strange though that may seem," he went on slowly, his voice muffled somehow, even to put it into words. This premonition I have. I – I feel that I am going to get it tomorrow, then I'll never see you again – never."

This boy, this handsome boy, whom I liked immensely and who I wanted, taking about never seeing me. The sound of his voice, sadder still than the contents of his words, welled up within me a deep loneliness, a desperation I did not wholly understand. But which I understand today. And I blurted out:

"We all have that fear," trying to console him. "We all feel that, surely the next campaign will kill us off, that our luck can't hold out indefinitely."

"No, Rex. It goes deeper than that," he went on to explain, shifting his position on the ammunition box, his body a little nearer to mine. "It's almost as if death is tapping me on the shoulder." He looked away again and his voice was sad, remote, forlorn. "Maybe everyone who is dead has felt this same way – the way I feel now, have known ahead of time."

His sudden talk about death, his lonely sound, his suddenly tired, bewildered face took hold of my heart and turned it into something wild, something desperate. I wantd him now with a longing so intense, so dominant,

that the cry screamed from the back of my mind, tore through every fiber of my flesh, through the ache in my heart. If only he would take me in his arms, if only he would kiss me, if only my lips were on his, then I could make him understand more fully what I meant than all my stumbling inadequate words.

But he did not touch me, though the longing in my eyes burned into his, and his remoteness wrung my heart. I began to tremble, as if I was standing in a gale, and I longed that he say something, do something that would mold us as one, that would make me a part of him, belonging in some way to him, even for a moment, this night, this last interval before death on Guam claimed us all.

If I was to have him at all, and in any way, then this would have to be the time, the night, the moment. For, if it was the truth what he said, that he knew he was going to die, then I would never see him again, would never know what it was like to feel the touch of his body, the fulfillment of his sex, his arms around me, his lips on mine, and I must – I must know these things!

I eased my thigh near his, touching him, and he kept his leg where it was It was a faint indication – too faint.

"It all seems such a waste," he continued, the accent in his voice not that of any given area but cosmopolitan, like an actor or a radio announcer. "My youth, my body. If I should die tomorrow what good shall it do? My death will not have gained victory for us, and I will have lost everything. Not only my life, but, oh, so may things I have not done yet and have wanted to do. That is the real loss, Rex, the loss of the things you have never done."

His words brought up sharply the memory of my great aunt who was a miracle of wise sayings and anecdotes. I can remember her rigid posture, like Queen Mary's, though not huge like her, rather thin, wryly strung, always elegant in lavender all over embroidery or black lace over champagne silk, smacking her lips over her psychology, her keen old eyes staring like a hawk's. And I remembered what she had said which sounded so much like Stanley. She was saying this to my mother who she loved profoundly, yet never understood,

and it was about one of us, I do not remember which.

"Let them live their own lives, Roxy," she had uttered, tired of her antiguity. "The loss of things never possessed is the greatest loss of all."

Now Stanley was speaking of those same things. though in a different way, and at a different age, a a different time. And I wanted to fill those losses for him, to plug in the gaps of his life, to give him all that he had never had yet longed for.

"You know," he went on, "I have never loved a girl, nor had one love me, always too busy at the university." Hhe shrugged. "I – I have never even, and I don't mind tell you, I have never even had sex with anyone."

"Do you feel you have missed a lot?" I asked, the topic of the conversation getting around to my immdiate interests.

He laughed softly.

"I suppose so, if it's like everyone says it is, but frankly," and he shrugged his shoulders again, "It all seems so highly overrated. They sell everything with sex, from kotex to bull-dozers."

He was silent then, and I was at a loss on what to say. Our legs remained touching, and the warmth of his thighs was wholesome somehow, not of sex, nor of lust, but the warmth of the spirit, like the coming of love.

"Too late to matter now – anyway," he said, break ing the silence. "So, what the hell. No one really cares. I mean – I mean no one really loves me, except my mother I guess, nor cares whether I am killed or not."

"I do – I care," I spoke up readily, hoping my voice did not sound too anxious, too willing, which it did.

His gaze found mine, and he kept his eyes glued to mine for a tense, exciting moment.

"I think you really do," he said after a length of time. "I think you really care – about everyone – even your enemies. You like so any things, while I – I council out so much. You take the earth by the horns and twist it to your will, while I – I go slowly, reluctantly, dodging life, I suppose, dodging the things which I could like and which perhaps could make me happy."

"What things," I said breathessly, keyed to his every

word.

"Oh, caring for people I guess. Caring for them and giving them a chance to care for me. I never gave them a chance before. Scared I guess. Scared of life, scared of loving – of getting hurt."

"It is better to have loved and lost –" I quoted part of that well worn phrase, and smiling at him. The conversation was at a fever pitch now, and I weighed every word, every sigh, every sound, for something in it for me.

"One should care," he said dreamily. "Even with – with two men." He paused to see how I had gauged this last. Then he went on. "There is so much they can give one another, yet they never do, not rally. If – if only two men could be closer – without looking so ridiculous."

This was my cue. Mad for speed, like Cinderella approaching the stroke of midnight, I lay my hand on his thigh. He let it remain there. Every nerve in my body tingled.

"They do not have to be ridiculous," I told him, trying on purpose to make my voice sound as beguiling as I could. "It's just a right way and a wrong way to go about it – like everything else."

"I guess you're right," he agreed. Then he coughed. "Do you think – do you thing two men could – could even love one another?"

"Jesus spoke of love among me," I said smoothly, trying to be coy.

He stammered.

"That's not the kind of love I mean, not brother love either, but a love – a love similar to the love of man for woman."

"I don't know," I answered, lying of course. No man ever loved a woman as madly, as profoundly, nor as thoroughly as Luther loved me. Then I corrected my error, taking a positive rather than the negative view. "I do not see why not. That is, if one of them is feminine and the other extremely masculine."

"But – but suppose they were both extremely masculine? What then? Could they love one another, their bodies?"

I kept him baited.

"I am sure they can, if they were, let us say situated

in a certain kind of environment, being brought together through no direct action of their own. Like in the war – where there are no women (I was thinking of those marines in the B-Z section who had raped me, taking me mainly because of the absence of women, not because they coveted the body of a male). After all, love is of the heart, the spirit, and men have this things as well as women. Perhaps it's all in the mind."

"He looked away for an instant, his face glamorously lit by the pale illumination oi the moon which had appeared in the star-studded sky so unexpectedly, as though it was turned on his face purposely.

"And sex – what about sex?"

"It happens," I answered, as though I was the wisdom of the ages.

"I know," he said, and he lay his hand over mine, though as if he had done it accidentally. "There were two boys where I went to college – they loved each other, yet there were plenty of women – college girls, pretty girls. I – I saw no harm in it."

Cinderella's clock struck midnight.

"Could you – could you love me, Stanley?" I cried, my every nerve exploding. Had he knocked me off the railing and into the water I would have still asked. "Could you – even though we are both masculine, even if there were girls here?"

He turned directly to see if any marines remained along the rails, and my throat leaped with a struggle to breathe, thinking frightfully that my question had disarmed him, had broken the magic spell, but on seeing that we were alone, that the other marines had gone to their bunks early for the invasion tomorrow, he turned back and his dark eyes were wide and sparkling clear.

"I – I do love you," he whispered softly, the sound of his voice obliterating war, the invasion, the fate on which our lives were thinly hinged. "I would still love you, even if this damned LTS was swarming with girls. I love you and I am going to have you now, tonight, here – here in this gun turret."

"Oh, Stanley," I uttered, sinking into his arms, which went instantly around me, burying my head in his wonderfully warm chest. My spirit was on wings, but a tinge of bitterness ghawed inside my heart "Why didn't you tell me before now – this our last night."

"I'm a coward," he answered, and he kissed me, kissed savagely. "Like always – afraid – afraid of a rebuff, afraid of being found out, afraid of what you would think of me if I did."

"Oh, you fool!" I cried, as we sank down onto the cold metal deck. "And our time. Our time is running out."

"God forgive me!" he half sobbed the words. "I spoin everything just like this. It's the story of my life – put off, wait –."

"We must make every second count," I said, and with deepest meaning, trying not to think of tomorrow and all the rest of the tomorrows of my life. He was mine, tonight, if but for this one night, and it was my duty now to make him realize it. One kiss would have to mean a hundred kisses. One touch of my hand on his body would have to mean a hundred touches. The climax of sex would have to represent a thousand sexual rhythms.

"We will be star crossed lovers," he sighed, bringing his dream world into the stark reality of our lives, our existence with each other for this, so brief a moment." Romeo and Juliet.

"Me being Juliet," I said, knowing instinctively it was the way he wanted it.

He spread out our towels and turned me over on my stomach. His warm body eased up on mine as gracefully as a circus performer. How wonderful he was, how deeply tender with his masculinity, how suave, so unlike those marines in the wretched hollow on Guadalcanal. How easily he could achieve the same thing, and without struggle, without clumsiness, without brutality. Yet, had he been brutal, had he pained me until that fire hot pain set my tears flowing, I would have gloried in him, would have surrendered my body in that rich reward which comes with love.

Perhaps, as I look back on those times now that night, I have wondered if the glory I felt with him was not somehow emblazoned and exaggerated in my due partly because, fearing his premonition of death, the minuteness of the relation took on its great significance. Yet, it was not the magic of the time, the hurry, the exciting fear of being caught, the war, the tenseness of war, which has dominated my memory of that night.

It was his body alone – and what a body! It was Stanley, and Stanley alone. This prince, this reincarnated Knight from that ancient world was to me on that reckless night – speeding across that dark Pacific into the very cannon's mouth of the enemy – the ultimate in sex, the supreme without the profane, for he was giving himself to me, giving his body, his love, for the first time.

Innocense has always held more sexual glamour than the experienced. The cleaner one lives, the healthier one is, the more maddening the desire when it comes, and to this boy, rapt with his desires, young, utterly healthy, he was employing to the utmost the ultimate of himself. The joy be received was my joy, a joy honeyed with rapture, a swhen his warmth coalesced in flaming embrace and sped down the orbit of my body, shot too far from its parent home ever to be drawn home again, yet not far enough to escape the laws of its natural path and its guidance. A white hot incandescent chaos, bursting under the antagonism of its elements, I knew I had thrilled him beyond the realm of all thrills.

Yet – unlike Norman, nor Maurice, even Luther (and I must say it – even Luther, though I loved Luther with all my human potential), so unlike I was with them, I could not get enough of Stanley. I could not get close enough, could not reach him in his hurried spell, this limited haitus which the Gods and allowed us.

When he turned over on his back, reposeful, his naked body gleaming like phosporescence, I moved toward him, kissed him on the chest, the naval, guiding my desires with the trail of my lips on and on, desperately, seeking out what I must do -- but had never done before – taking the only path which fate had mapped for me. me up to his face and kissed me and whispered lovingly:

When I was through he gave contented sighs, pulled

God – oh, God, you were wonderful."

Yet, the most wonderful, most precious thing in life are short lived. Perhaps that is what makes them precious to us. Rarity is the secret to adoration. We possess these treasures but for a little while then must give them over to their owners.

I gave Stanley to eternity.

CHAPTER 7

The following morning, amist a world gone completely beserk, against a barrage of gunfire and smoke, through bomb torn countryside, hell itself, despite the fact that a beautiful rainbow lifted its circle from the Pacific where were stationed an armada of battleships and curved to touch that battered town of Agana, I found Stanley. Found him accidentally, as I stumbled blindly with a group of other marines from one of the line companies, lying on his back near the outbreak of a sugar cane field, his arms and legs spread eagle, a neat bullet bole between his eyes.

That he had premonitioned his death shook me more that his death itself. And, as I gazed tor a moment at his body, his placid, immobile face, he seemed to me something of the super-natural, and became even more valuable in my eyes. He had known he was going to die, and that knowledge had not doubt made his last hours on earth a living hell. Remembering swiftly the night before in the gun turret, he had been amazingly calm, even in the wake of his doom. He had been a perfect god, but god or not, never again would those glorious thighs warm from the emulation of sex, nor those cleanly cut lips glow with passion.

I hurried on, the memory tearing at my frightened heart like sharp claws, threatening to unhinge my mind. There was no sensible point in remaining, to torment myself by picking out every detail of his corpse. Better to remember him alive, warm, healthy, to remember the placidity of his voice lammenting about life, love, better to remember his body on mine, pulsating with the rich vigor of life, than to see him forever in this haze of green flies swarming over him, his eternal bed a torn and twisted heap of sugar stalks.

Onward then, across that flat stretch of rice and sugar cane fields, with the off shore guns of Task Force 53 roaring unceasingly, belching fire and smoke into the early morning air. For seventeen days now, naval gunfire and aerial bombardment had brought havoc and destruction to the beaches and the torturous landscape was almost impossible.

Patiently, lying in their shelters and in the wooded folds of reverse slopes, the Japs had survived the shock

of that preliminary shelling and by now had returned to their remaining guns and mortars perched on the ridges of Chonito Cliff, which formed the seaward edge. This morning's fighting was indicative of the Japs fighting characteristcs I was quick to learn. Pointless bravery, unhuman tenacity, cave fighting, infiltration (often indistinguishable from straggling) the will to lose hard. Gun fire and mortar blasts peppered down around me like rain. Yet, in time, making my way independently, I managed as many of the rest, to move with that slow but continuous sweep inland, abreast with the troops advancing from Tepungan, Anaga, and Alana, and gradually upwards to Chonito Cliff.

There is no purpose in relating my minute by minute advance through that hell on earth, to catalogue my fears, my constant terror, of the dead I discovered along the way, of the noise, the screams, the dying, for war is not the essence of my story. Man can exist successfully in any environment he creates for himself. It is the heart and the spirit which give him trouble.

So it is enough to say that I reached Chonito Cliff safely, without so much as a scratch, to that scheduled site where all the R-2 section scouts would come eventually to meet, and reported my findings, my hastily drawn field maps to Captain Yaknow.

He drew me to one side, away from the shallow dugout canopied with a number of ponchos together, which made up Regimental headquarters, perhaps purposely. I know now it was purposely, looking back on that totally fatal day, and realizing almost gladly, that he had understood my nature more than I could have ever imagined at the time.

"Your buddy, Mryka, is wounded, wounded badly I am afraid," he half whispered the words, his golden neatly trimmed mustache gleaming like a pagan's in the tropical light.

"Really – how bad?" I choked, frantic by his ill – timed message, when I was sodden with sweat and fatigue, when my wholy body shook from fever and the tenseness of our present predicament.

"Yes," he announced gravely, trying not to look at me. He shifted the rifle on his shoulder. "Shot in the left side, through the lungs."

"Any others?" I said listlessly, thinking only of Myrka

but trying to hold my outburst of emotion, my true feelings to a minimum.

"Hugh Rushing is dead, killed before he reached the beach and Delfino and Young – both dead."

His voice trembled, then died in a sigh.

"Where is Myrka now?" I cried, impatiently, too impatiently. My desire to see him, to know first hand how really badly he had been hit, if he was going to die, rasping against my nerves like a file, scurrying me out of my old reserve – a reserve which no longer mattered to me.

"At the beach hospital," he said, pointing down the hill scattered with marines, trucks, jeeps, guns, and littered debris.

My eyes followed his hand, caught one satisfied glimpse of a huge green tent sprawled near the beach far below, a thousand miles away it seemed to me in my irresolute madness, my desperation to be near him.

"Captain Yaknow, can I go see him, please?" I asked defiantly, casting aside all obligations, all sense of duty, with this one mad urge, this one insane obstinancy to still time – to halt the movement of the universe until I could reach his side, his voice, see his small, elfish voice.

He nodded. And I bounded off down the hill, pivoting my way around marines coming up, past jeeps stalled in the mud, through ravines dug by cannon and mortar, down – down amidst that whirling nightmare of bodies wreathing in agony, some on stretchers, some being lifted and carried by others already slightly wounded, ma y already dead, their faces hideous masks amid the smoke and madness.

Oh, my God! How was I to know. How was I to know that as I reached the foot of the hill and up that slight mound to the hospital tent that Myrka was already dead. How was I to know, for as I entered that enormous canopy there seemed a momentary halo of peace about the place, now that I was so near him, and the warm sun seemed to cover all the earth.

He was lying on one of the numerous army cots strung out in distorted rows, and on one which faced the beach, the dark green canvas rolled and tied so that the ocean front, the haze of blue waves framed his still white face. His eyes were closed. Instantly, I knew

that he was dead. That vacant feeling, that hollow something which momentarily leaves us when someone is taken from us, that thrust in the pit of our stomachs, was upon me, and I stood looking at him, looked quietly with hand on hear, my mind numbed, my eyes blinded with tears.

My chin trembled and I was on the verge of a wild outburst of sobs, but some remnants of pride, of restraint checked me. I wanted to reach out and hug him to my heart, to kiss those dainty lips almos purple now, but I could not even touch him. My body had paralized. Love and hatred of fate had turned me into stone.

The sunlight streaming in from the tent flaps flooded his face in a tender light, and a slight breeze from the ocean lifted the strands of his golden hair and I thought he looked asleep – a troubleless, profound sleep, removed from war, from privation, from all rear – even the fear of the ruthless rapists who had mutilated his wonderful body on Guadalcanal – thank God – they could not touch him now!

Two navy internes on burial details swept past me with a stretcher and proceeded to lift him from the bunk and onto it. One of them brushed against me, but I was too immune of my surroundings to notice it.

"Step aside, Mac," he said roughly, purposely sticking one end of the stretcher pole into my ribs. I hardly flinched, yet obeyed, moving to the outside of the tent, but still close enough to witness the proceedings.

Once he was on the stretcher and the blanket removed from him and placed back on the cot, made ready for another wounded, I saw that his body was caked with mud. I went sick at the sight, of his immaculate body, which he had so in life cleansed so religiously, to come to this in his death. With that mud, dried now and stuck to his fatigues, was his own blood, that too caked and hardened around the area of his heart.

I wanted to lift him from the stretcher, whisk him away from this flapping tent, this iniquity of wounds and death, and with my burning love, take him accross that length of sand and bathe his body in those clean, salty ocean waves, to prepare him for the altar of his God.

Silently, I cursed fate, cursed all mankind – even cursed God. So simple a ritual – and what a ritual it

would mean to me! – to wash his smooth white limbs, his chest, his face, and when, but forty feet away, roared enough shiny water to wash the world. Yet, I dared not. The cruel society into which man has created for himself, and has imprisoned himself forbade me.

I could do nothing but turn and go – back into the tenacity of the living, into war, flirting, playing with life and death. But in Myrka's death I had one consolation.

As I was passing through a group of marines lying wounded out on the beach outside the tent, awaiting to be admitted into the hospital, my tearful eyes fell on a familiar face among them. It was the huge, bulldog like marine who had raped me so maliciously and who had later taken Myrka on that wild Christman night. His huge, oversized legs were spread wide and about his crotch a gory mass of blood and hair and of tattered garments told a livid story.

I smiled triumphantly.

His eyes found mine, and their lights dulled into apathy at the sight of me, a morose stare which went to the back of my mind.

"Well – I see you finally got yours," I said to him acidly, and I showed my brightest smile. He turned his head from me, I continued on to Chonito cliff and to regimental headquarters.

I have always believed that life forms a complete circle, that what man does to other in his youth he will receive in old age. Never did this reveal itself to be utterly true than in the contrast of this bulk of a boy who had used his strength, his sex organ as a weapon to the defenseless, now, and by an ironic twist of fate, to have his organs torn from that body, to place him forever a deprived cripple sexually. And I wondered if, as he lay on that tattered beach, the glory of his manhood decapatited, if his conscience opened the callowness of his mind and he dared to look back upon that rape. I am sure he did, and has many times since.

He deserved what he had gotten.

But heartbreak does not patronize only the unjust. It finds it's way into all of us. I was to lose Cisco too.

I lost him on that torturous wind driven sand dunes of Iwo Jima, an island that resembled a movie landscape of Mars, lost him in Cushmans pocket, a honeycomb of

caves and ravines far beyond the Jap lines.

We had been on a five ma patrol, three of our men being killed by a flat trajectory shell when the Japs spotted us trying to cross Motoyama airfield number three, and on that fatal twilight, Cisco and I, weak from fatigue, from strain and from fright, entered that first crust which dropped abruptly into hell, and into his death.

No sooner had we lowered ourselves down onto that rugged floor, seeking a safe place for the night, for he realized that we were far beyond the front lines, than a Jap straggler, stationed in the mouth of a near by cave, fired and hit Cisco with a nambo machine gun.

Seeing the waif of blue smoke from the nose of the machine-gun rising out of the cave, I withdrew my forty-five and riddled the entrance. I heard a faint scream.

I went to where Cisco lay and knelt beside him. The bullets had pierced his stomach and life fled from him quickly. With feeble eyes he looked up at me and there was constriction in my heart. He did not try to fight back for the life that was leaving him behind, that was flowing out his sides and onto the dark sand. He opened his mouth and spoke to me in a faint flat voice.

"Sorry – so sorry – I done you – wrong," he muttered, the blood oozing from the corner of his lips.

"It does not matter now," I cried, trying to call life back into him, realizing that only death could have wrung that confession from him.

Then he whispered, his tired voice as though he came from somewhere far off, some alien place where I could not follow.

"I – I love – you – Bambino!"

It was the last words he ever did. I sat beside him all that night, guarding him, consoled by his death bed declarations, listening to the faint popping of rifle fire from both of the lines.

No, I did not love him. But I will always remember those earlier times with him, before he told our secret to the rapists and the terror that was to follow, would remember his kidding, his sense of humor, his quick, stolen kisses, his smooth body on mine.

On the following morning, as the marines advanced to the pocket, he was placed on a stretcher and taken

to the cemetery at the foot of Mt. Suribachi to be buried, where later, much later, before leaving that wrecked island, I went to see his grave, standing in that long level shadow, recalling old times, evoking old memories.

Later, aeons and aeons later, after many, many nightmares, after 5,569 casualties, after 1,131 deaths in my regiment alone, after one marine dropped down to the beach on the northern tip and filled his canteen with water, and brought it back with the inscription on it, "for inspection not consumption," the war was over for me.

On a ship bound for the United States, I went down into the hold and, with two needles attached to a match stem, and with black higgens ink, I tattooed a tiny star directly beneath my right eye, my eternal brand for an old bitterness, an oath against mankind and of the love of mankind. A star, which was to later be my label, to be incorporated in my name on all my paintings – that word. which was to resound again and again in those lavender alleyways, in those dimly lit lairs, in those strangely illuminated bars and lounges where those of my kind will seek out their loneliness, will search for their counterparts, their own facsmiles, the things they will both love and abhor, in searching out their own.

I had been victim to both man's lusts and man's hatred, and this star would remind me of those lusts and those hatreds, would remind me of war and of death, and the ageless death of anarchy and of loneliness.

Suddenly, older now, more experienced, with fewer illusions to the glories of life, bitter, distraught, I wanted home. I wanted home more than I had ever wanted it in my life, wanted the avenue of oaks and trailing moss leading up to the house, wanted the white columns glowing in the starlight, wanted the fleecy white curtains blowing at the opened windows, the red roads at twilight, the hills, the bridle trails, the flowers in the old ancient garden.

Why – this was March – and it would be spring when I arrived, the lawn dappled with emerald, the delicate Iris and narcissus loading the alcoves under the laden trees with scent. And Luther would be there!

Somehow, I would get him back. How, I did not know. But I would find a way to wrest him from his parents,

to get him alone, to bring back all that we had lost, to fill in that gap of time since the war had come to take him away from me.

Yet, soon after we boarded the ship at Iwo Jima, leaving that ghost ridden island like a whale wallowing in its death throes, all of our past mail was brought aboard and there was a letter from my mother stating that Luther was dead, drowned in a sunken battleship off the shores of Normandy.

CHAPTER 8

A month later, as the train sped me across that three thousand miles from San Diego to Mississippi, across that vast stretch of land, a land faintly, tiredly gold in dawn and sunset, stretching endless. Taking me back home after four years of war and the marines, my honorable discharge on my lap, my dark body emblazoned by my dark green uniform, my campaign ribbons, my mind harbored on those I had left behind – had left forever.

I thought of Stanly, and Myrka Ray, and Cisco, lying back there on those islands half a world away, the click-click of the train wheels on that shiny rails taking me still further away from them by each minute, each second.

Going home now, anxious, a little frightened, the three marines I had loved and lost were of another time, another dimension, drawn away now as though they had never happened, no more than figments of my imagination. But their memory would be drawn to me during the years to come, bits here and there, a catchword, a phrase, as even today, never does a twenty four hour period go by that something some thought, some material thing, does not send their images trooping back into my mind, and with that image a touch of sadness, a pinch at the heart.

But now, still young, still vigorous with good health, despite war, despite privation, despite worry, fear and heartbreak, I was leaving all that behind, taking this new road, this unfamiliar path which fate had mapped for me – was already mapping – as I sped through Texas towns, across deserts (remembering Cisco going through Houston), feeling happy somewhat, triumphant that I had broken free of those rapists on the island of Guadalcanal, but unknowingly speeding into another life as infiltrated with agony as the one I had left behind. For now that the war was practically over, another kind of army was moving into the land, and army of punks, tattered, woegone, beligerant, more harassing than Jap or rapist, but of which, not knowing now, not as I sped homeward, but of which I will tell later, much later when that path will wind down into their midst, their very headquarters, and into their own kind of

loneliness.

I was a pale, somewhat frightened ex-marine who got off the train at the Illinois central depot in Jackson, Mississippi and greeted my mother and father, my three brothers and my syster. Seeing the town, or city actuallly, as the train slowed and crept like a snail in through the caverns of stone and steel, my mind was recaptured by Luther, by the familiar places we had been, had shared together in this clean, capitol city of the south. Those remainders were only forerunners, I knew, of the familiar alcoves and trails we had shared and I would come to see again when I reached home.

But momentarily, my mind rested easily when we reached Subrosa and my own bedroom, my precious belongings, things I had not seen in this past four years, the undivided attention of my parents (who thought I looked thin, drawn, because of the fighting, doing without food) and slowly something of my old self returned. The glory of sleeping between white sheets once again, of walking barefoot on carpeted floors, of listening to the mocking birds directly outside my window in the early morning, of being besieged with trays of fried eggs and sausage, pork, slabs of beef, southern fried chicken, cake dripping with chocolate, banana pudding, of riding my stallion on the old back trails. Feeling the coming of spring frothing around me, drew me once again into the lovely land which had borne and reared me and the life I had led, had lived through terror, receeded into the dim border-line of my mind.

Then, on Saturday afternoon, that orderly world which I was slowly coming to grasp once more, taking on all proportions of normally with my reign of rest, good food, sleep, a family world of family interests, forever realistic because it stood on rules, I was to return to that anarchy, that world without restriction.

It was Luther's burial. Though there was no trace of his body in the battleship which had found its own grave in those terrifying waters, Mr. and Mrs. Faron had set up a tomb in the cemetery which lay next to my father's land, and had a quiet ceremony in commemoration.

I stood far back from the crowd, just as I had stood that awesome day on Guam outside the hospital tent and saw Myrka for the last time. The sun, again like on Guam, was warm and the breeze was kind, sighing

sadly through the pines and dropping their needles down onto the heads of the mourners. The canopy which flapped occasionally, like flapping wings of angels, tapping the deepest recesses in my heart. In the limbs of a tall oak nearby a mocker let out its plaintive notes until the very air was filled with silver. The silence was like the vast limpidity of the sky, clean, pure blue, which was appropriate for Luther I thought. It dominated the whole of the countryside – like a race which dominates the individual .

I was sad, but my sadness had found its reserves in the months and months, even years away from him, and though he reached out across those miles of water and touched me on the heart, I could live with my loss of him now. Life had taken him away from me, as it had taken life from him and, embittered now, without illusion nor aspiration, my childs heart petrified. Immune to all love except the memory of my love for him, gave to me a certain needed courage, a repose which sealed over like a honey comb, the wild unreasoning, the tattered spirit, the recklessness which had inflamed that love to rekindle it again and again, and of which it had made itself known in his strong bronzed arms around me, his hot lips on mine, his stalwart body locked to my body.

When the crowd dispersed I saw Luther's mother and father come out from the shadows of the canopy, saw them look at me standing alone down the watershed of the hill, and their eyes even from this distance, moved me beyond description. She moved toward me, as if to speak, to perhaps say she was worry, but wary of her approach, this stately woman in black, shadowed by a veil which lifted with the sad play of the wind, I turned abruptly and went down to where the cemetery fence separated the grounds from my father's property. Though I was dressed in my best, my Italian black suit and black varnished boots, I climbed the fence and through the dark wall of pines which hid me completely. I did not look back. She had denied him once from me and whatever she may say now, whatever tacticts she might employ, my ears and my heart would be deft to her words.

CHAPTER 9

I wanted to be alone, to think out my own thoughts, to bury, if I could, the choking pains which invaded me. Going under the low limbed pines and through that sun dappled carpet, where mountains of white dogwood shimmered against a background of new green, I came out on the old Indian trail which Luther and I had used so long ago on our riding jaunts.

The quietness, the serenity, the cool avenue of shade, the sad rustle of old driven leaves, played upon my heart in a kind of soothing rhythm, easing my pain, curing my sorrow.

Yet, as I went down that emerald trail, besieged with springs scents, of the tenderness which heralds all southern springtimes, fate was up ahead somewhere, waiting for me. That out of the death of one love, that the passing of it should be borne another, was incoherent to my kind of thinking. Love – like a beautiful flower that dies and from the medulla of that dead stem spring another, perhaps even more beautiful, more radiant than the last.

The love that was to come out of that southern patch of woodland, with its dove calls, its mockers, its thick perfumes, was as if nature had intercepted my heartbreak over Luther and was to bring back to me in another form, another time, Luther incarnate.

As I approached a little creek which hid, rather half hid its course in an entanglement of wild honeysuckle, and to a small plank bridge which forded it, and (oh, how well I remembered, the many times Luther and I had lay on that bridge on our stomachs and drank that cool, sparkling water which ran underneath) I heard a horse neigh. It was a natural enough sound, for my father's horses and kept their abodes in this noiseless paradise. But then came the dull thud of horses hooves on the boards of the bridge, hollow, echoing sounds, and I looked up quickly to see a white stallion being guided over the rough planks by a young boy – a boy not over sixteen – who sat astraddle him.

A bright shaft of sunlight, pouring down from the high green canopy of leaves, emblazoned them with light, and with so brightly illuminated, (the white horse shone, he seemed luminous) I thought for a moment that they

were unreal.

At the unexpected sight of them I grew a little startled, but continued walking toward them, keeping the easy languid gait I had taken up on leaving the cemetery.

"Hi, Mr. Polo," the boy said pleasantly, his young, radiant face breaking into a ready smile—a smile which showed two rows of white teeth – white as the stallion he rode – I thought, as I stared up at him. "What are you doing here in the woods, all dressed up? I thought you were in the marines."

"I was," I answered, trying to figure out how he knew my name, though that Mr. put me in the age bracket, and called attention to his youth, but I didn't mind. I explained. "I have been discharged. I – I have been to Luther's – to someones funeral over at the cemetery."

"Oh," he whispered, drawing the reins up and halting the stallion in the middle of the bridge.

I went up on the bridge and stood beneath him, looking up and, needless to say, was admiring him. He was dressed in kakhi shorts, their lengths cuffed until they struck the upper portions of his thighs, was shirtless, and had on black nake boots, with white socks down neatly over the leather which made a startling contrast to his sun bronzed legs – legs thick with saddle muscles and in direct proportion to his thick arms with strutted veins as he held back tightly on the reins. He had wide shoulders, a smooth, hairless, chest, and a hard flat stomach which heightened the contours of those tiny abdomen muscles each time he inhaled and exhaled. He was crowned with a riot of thick, curly hair, savagely dark, but which glittered like oil on water as the wind lifted the strands and flung them wildly about his eyes – eyes that were as emerald as the coral water on the island of Guam.

Astride the white stallion, his almost naked body inflamed by the hot sun, his youth so predominate a thing, it made me tremble. There was something etherally wild about him, yet his voice was calm and there was a directness, an assurance about his eyes that would have degraded the fiercest of men. They looked straight at you, in fact, through you, exactly as the look I had seen in the eyes of a lion at the zoo.

He was magnificent. But, all men are magnificent on

horseback.

"How was the marines?" he asked directly, the sound of his young voice telegraphing his interest in anything physical, masculine.

"All right, I suppose," I answered him objectively, not wishing to harp on past horrors. "I got back safely anyway." I took hold of the horse's bridle, resting my arm. "Somehow, I can't place you. Are you new here? I mean, have you moved here recently?"

"Don't you know me?" he came back, a little puzzled.

Embarrassed, I shook my head. Was I supposed to know him?

"Don't you remember, you use to hold me in your lap on the school bus?"

My heart skipped a beat.

"Why – your Suny Martin, Jesse Martin's boy," I stammered, caught unawares. Now I remembered, thinking back to when he had always pushed his way to me whenever he got on the bus each morning, climbing upon my knees, his books in one hand, a bouquet of flowers in the other. I had always thought him the cutest of children. Like me, when I was that age, he was elfishly small, and had played, I remembered, Tom Thumb in a Tom Thumb wedding at school. He had looked like a midget, in his black scissor tailed coat, white shirt, and tiny black bow tie.

"That's right," he uttered, flashing those white teeth again. "You used to call me Suny-buny." He laughed again, this time a little frivolously.

"Time sure flies," I said lowly, not being able to think of anything better to say.

"Yes – sure does," he came back proudly. "I am going to be in the twelfth grade this next semester – and you – you are a grown man, gone to war and fought many battles your mother said."

"I hope she has not been bragging about me," I said, yet I knew she had. By now, I was sure everyone in Rankin county knew every campaign, every skirmish, every patrol I had ever been on.

"No," he answered, "not really, but she did let me know whenever she got letters from you and she would always let me read them. I have followed your complete career in the marines." Then he thrust out his chest. "If I have to go in the service then I am going to take the

marines."

"Well, thank you, Suny," I said, and a little sadly I know, for he had touched my heart with his admiration for me. I needed that kind of admiration, needed the comfort of knowing that someone knew and cared about my life, cared if I lived or died.

"Can I ride you home?" he asked simply, eagerly, reaching out his hand for me to catch hold.

"Sure," I answered, anxious, somewhat excited by this new, completely new, invigorating person who had unsuspectingly come into my life, who had already been a part of my life, following my campaigns in the war, though I had forgotten he had never existed.

I put my foot in the stirrup, caught hold of his wrist, and he swung me up and behind him on the saddle with the easy grace of slight of hand. He turned the stallion in the middle of the bridge and sent him plodding up the well used lane.

I gripped him on each side of the waist, where his naked flesh came to meet his khaki shorts, in order to steady myself, and he seemed not to mind. In fact, I believed he considered me some kind of hero, and was honored my nearness, my touch.

In the life I was to lead with him in the immediate future, a life of intimacy, of love surely, if one can truly, absolutely, love a second time, his admiration, his hero worship for me never dimmed. It has been an ever constant thing, to this day, to the moment of this writing. And it was he, years later, when finally having told him about how the marines had treated me, it was he, who encouraged me, who insisted that I write this story.

When he halted the lathered white stallion at the wooden gate leading up the lane and to my father's barn, I slid off the back of the saddle, my hands going firmly down his naked legs and stood for a moment looking up at him.

The evening sun was in back of him, its white corona directly behind his head, and I got a picture of the true cavalier on the white horse of dreams, and my mind went back – back – to Luther. Dare I dream it? Luther had come back to me, from some other time, from some other world, and my heart pounded like a bellish girl with her first beau.

Strange, that he could come back in the form of this stalwart, handsome – I must say utterly, profoundly handosme – the most handsome person, the most wonherful in both body and mind that I have ever known – to come back on the very day of Luther's funeral was uncanny.

Yet, here he was, looking down from his magnificent white horse, seeing through me, I thought, reading messages about me I cared not at the moment for him to read. Nevertheless, inflaming my mind to seek him out in the times to follow, filling me utterly with the fiery ambitions to pursue him, to love him, to have him for my own.

Innocent though he might have been, unaware of my past, unaware of my desires, inconceived of such a thing existing between two men, his nature, his fine looks, his youth (the very idea that he was Luther come back from death) reached down to me, clutched my ambitions, whispered something into my ear, this magic something that would send me down the rails of anarchy seeking him, taking him.

"Do you still paint like you use to, Mr. Polo?" he asked shyly. His green eyes, with their long lusty lashes, burned down to mine, and his body, streaming with perspiration, burned too, inflamed, as if he withdrew that fire from within, glowing like a torch in the noon day's sun.

I answered that I did. Then I added:

"Suny, you do not have to call me Mr. Polo. Call me Rex instead.

He smiled a hearty smile.

"Thanks," he whispered. "would you paint me sometimes – please."

He was in deep earnest. That earnestness showed on his face, burned in his eyes, radiated from his well formed lips.

I assured him that I would. I never told him any of my own thrill from studying his body, his features his true beauty while I plied oil to canvas.

He had set the stage. Thankfully, though I did not know it then, those stage lights of our existence together would never dim, the stage itself never vacated by its two principal actors. Though there would be no audi-

ence, the Gods would applaud us.

He turned the stallion in the lune, the turf flying, and headed him into the sun. I stood and watched them until they disappeared in a clump of cedars breaking the pasture from the woods.

Then I went to the house, my mind whirling like a treadmill's, my ambitions soaring. I forgot Stanly and Myrka and Cisco out on those ash gray mounds in the South Pacific – shamefully, I forgot Luther.

The dairy farm where Suny lived sprawled like a miniature kingdom in a four hundred acre plot, beset with horses, cattle, huge throughbed jersey bulls, a large lake, brick barns, silos, elongated canvas covered chicken houses, fruit orchards, and a spacious house on a lawn so beautiful, so well tended it looked like a set from a southern movie.

Suny, like Luther, had his own living quarters independent of the main house, but, unlike Luther's, his set out under a grove of pines, and was called, as in pre-civil war days, the summer house.

It was in this beautiful, richly adorned retreat, while our saddled horses grazed outside, that I painted him, making hurried preliminary pencil sketches at first, then completing them in pen and ink, or in Tempra. He always posed in a bathing suit and because he had such perfect proportions despite his small height (he was only five feet like me) but heavier, broader, and so pleased was I with the results, I mailed some of them to a physique magazine. The response was amazing. The delighted editor anxiously wrote back, hopeful of many more such physique art studies, and requested a resume of Suny, his background, his schooling, his athletic interest – especially his athletic achievements.

Suny was tickled pink. He would sit for hours staring at the reproductions of him whenever they appeared in the physique magazines, and he could hardly wait from one publication to the next. He became somewhat of a celebrity, the paintings I had made of him appearing in every issue, and he was getting mail from artists, sculptors, and physique lovers from all over the world – even as far as Ireland, Sweden, and one from Egypt. We were paid a hundred dollars apiece for each painting used in a full page spread, which we divided, and which gave us ample spending money and a nest

egg besides.

We wrote to other similar magazines, send samples of his physique, and were always met with the same response as the first. They wanted paintings of him, original paintings never before published, for their magazines. It kept us busy constantly, and we felt that me had created a small business all our own. Our parents, too, were overwhelmed, though they did not see the essence behind some of those so called (pinup) publications.

True, basely, most of them were published for the primary purpose of enticing young boys to build their bodies, incorporating the ideal that a healthy body produces a healthy mind, but there was a number of them which seem to produce an undercurrent of beauty, sex, promise. These I tried to cull, keeping them out of Suny's sight lest he draw the wrong conclusions and become reluctant to pose. Too, he was as pure as sunlight, as wholesome as homemade bread, and I wanted that image of him kept before the public eye – the public eye of our readers. I was careful that one of my paintings was never sold to any of the magazines except those who stressed the ultimate in strength and health.

Since I was older, and perhaps wiser, I supervised our little business, kept books, did all the correspondence, while Suny supplied the body, which in reality – was the essence of the business. For, had it not been for the exactness of his features, his adonis physique, my art work would have never stood alone for the sake of art itself. Though I was good at painting the human form, my own real love in art, my work glowed when it was of Suny. He was so easy to paint, with every muscle, every bone delineated, that a likeness came as a simple matter of transfer, my burning eyes on him, memorizing the image, then reflecting it upon the artboard, like a projection machine. With him, I had a photographic mind. In fact, in time, after having painted literally hundreds of life portraits of him, I could almost sketch his physique by heart. I knew the anatomy of his body that well.

We set up a series of paintings, which were produced in black and white, which sold like hot cakes. I would paint in realistic backgrounds, always having him doing

something active, which required the dexterity of his body, the play of his muscles, displaying power, strength, beauty. And the poses were realistic in content, and as a whole, for they never looked poses nor his body appar strained. His body was so perfect, a true work of art, that from any angle he stood, sat, reclined, he took on the nobility of a statue. I had him riding his horse, shooting a bow and arrow, swimming, wrestling, as ancients Gods of the Old World, as figures in history, always scantily clad, revealing, yet not revealing.

During all these series of paintings, during all these various changes of costumes, I never saw him naked once. Not that he was that modest. I could arrange his costume in any mather I so chose, could place his body in any position I wanted, and, like Stanly, he never objected, not once, not even one time when I braved the situation and rolled his lemon yellow shorts (they brought out the radiance of his rich skin) down so far below his naval it showed the pubic hair, did he flinch or move my hand from its position.

Yet, when changing completely, he would always go into another room of the summerhouse, then return a little later either fully clothed, or in the costume he was to use next.

I know now, on looking back, that this trivial bit of action was due not to his modesty, but for and because of his deep respect, his his idealistic admiration for me. It was his way of respecting the modesty he thought I had (I could be reserved whenever I wanted to) by keeping the modesty which was his.

To the pure in heart all things are pure.

Once, I harbored the thought that perhaps he was ashamed of his nakedness, that probably his organs were small, undeveloped, and he did not want them displayed, but I dispelled such thoughts whenever I saw his crotch during those posing periods, his shorts bulging, the defined image of his masculinity plainly visible through the silky material of his bathing suit.

His body was maddening to me. Sometimes, when I was painting him, I would tremble so with basic carnal lust I could not hold a brush and would have to call a recess. Like all the innocent in life, he never seemed to take notice in my change of emotions, my voice, which I could not keep from trembling, and my eyes which

purposely avoided his body.

To say he flounced his body before me is basically untrue. He was not that kind. He is still not. But it amounted to the same thing. He was giving himself to me, but still not giving really. He was mine in a way, in a dim far off way which would never satisfy me, but which I knew I must keep, if I was to have him at all.

To risk losing his hero impressions of me, his loyal friendship, his wholesomeness, to tarnish something that glittered like gold by bringing in, by introducing sex, I became resigned to accept our relationship upon this basis. After all, he was younger than I, he was so pure, he automatically purified everything he touched. He was handsome, he was a perfect model, and he was innocent of life, so what more should I ask of him, what more should I suspect?

He knew nothing of my way of life – the life that had become my nature since Norman first took me when I was only fifteen years old. And he would have become dormant to me had he known, would have bowed out of my life with the gentleman like grace which dominated his character. And to lose him, to lose our long sessions posing, riding our horses, the long conversations with him in the summerhouse, his respect, this I could not, would not do.

Yet, I had changed since my earlier times, was still changing, and to live beside him, see him almost compleley nude, to lay my quivering hands on him yet not touch him really, was a maddening process, a trial which left me weak, exhausted, and at times irritable to those at home. I had changed, changed slowly, in that earlier, only the others had taken me, had used me, without tapping the essence of my true nature, that is, all of them except Luther, and now, gradually, I was becoming to want others, like I had wanted Stanly that dark ocean night on the way to the battle of Guam – as I wanted Suny now.

I wanted his body, his sex, wanted too his mind and his heart, and felt strongly that one was incomplete without the other. In part, I am like that today. It is impossible for me to like a man, a man who is supposed to be straight – as Suny is straight – without feeling the need of him sexually. Though I may not desire him sexually, the thought imposes itself upon me, and I

wonder how he would be in bed.

But to take someone in their youth, to take them sexually, to drive them out of their shelter, to storm their peaceful, innocent worlds, tarnish them, soil their garments, is to me the most cur-like thing on earth.

Yet, if I was to have Suny Martin, to have his body as I had dreamed having it, then I would have to turn complete cur, would have to drag him from that lovely, sheltered home, out of the realm of his innocence, and soil him for the glory, the fullfilment of my lust.

And this I could not, must not do.

I had his mind and I had his heart – surely I had his heart – so I must not trifle with his body. One false move and I would loose all three.

But passion is stronger than the body, stronger than intelligence of the mind, stronger than any reasoning, however obstinate. It is the mainspring of life – as essential to us as breathing.

I vowed to have him!

The publications were playing out, after months and months now of successful sells, of hundreds of fan mail letters pouring in every day for Suny. Requests for paintings of Suny became fewer and fewer, then ceased altogether.

It threw us into a state of despair. The bright Lght which had lit up Suny's future so brilliantly, went out abruptly, but it left its afterglow.

I wanted a painting of Suny for myself, to hang in my own bedroom, so I jockeyed for this last favor, which he granted willingly. Though he was in an apathy over the lift of sells, for he did not fully understand the real truth behind them, he promised to pose for me whenever and however I wished.

Th Gods had not abandoned me. They were on my side once again.

I remembered an old painting which had hung for years in the long, airy hallway of Subrosa, brought from Kosciusko by my mother when she was only a bride. It was of a young Indian brave leading a pinto pony to water. Its colors had enriched with age, had darkened so that only the highlights of the Indian's body held the light. Instead of the flaming waste lands for a background, as in the picture, I wanted the natural beauty

of the woods at home, tall pines, dogwood blossoms against a carpet of pine needles, the long polished leaves of a magnolia and the white velvet blossoms entangled in the foreground.

I knew of such a place, a clump of woods walling a small pond which was fed by a natural spring. A place on the remotest boundary of my father's property, almost to Monterey, and I wanted to paint this painting on the spot, with Suny substituting for the Indian.

One day we packed a lunch and rode our horses over to the spot and set up for a days hard painting. I was eager about this painting, despite Suny's crestfallen attitude over the loss of his world wide popularity. And, because he was the central subject, I wanted it to be the best painting I had ever done. I wanted it to be his legacy to me. It is that. It hangs to this day in my bedroom at Subrosa which I have long since abandoned. Someday I will hang it in a perfect setting of natural light so that it can be truly appreciated.

For this one day's pencil sketch, Suny posed in his blue jeans, but shirtless, for it was the surroundings I wanted most at first, that perfect southern setting in which to frame the glory of his youth. His body could be added later, in the summerhouse, or anywhere in doors.

When I had decided that my penciled cartoon was an adequate skeleton from which to ply my Tempra, we ate, then started bac to his house. A range of dark clouds followed us, swept on a low wind, with cold drafts at times, bringing in a hollycost of rain, and in the shade of the cloud bank we seemed, somehow protected, as if a canopy of feathers floated above our heads. But when we reached a clearing and had to take the top most watershed of a razor backed hill, the wind blew in torrents, driving us, flinging our horses tails and manes in a wild fury about us. The sound was like the tide coming in on the cost of fairy. The air was full of leaves, whirling, boiling, like in a caldron. From everywhere, suddenly, came the wail of the vanquished. We drove our horses, as the rain lashed at us in torrents, and found a little shelter in the deep lanes, but when we came to a wooded area, leading up onto another hill the wind was reaping them like corn. Crackings and groanings, like loud reports of gun-fire, was all about

us, and the sheets of rain turned from slate gray to a blinding mass.

"There is a bar on the next hill," Suny shouted through the wall of water, taking hold of my stallion's reins.

"Lets go then," I cried anxiously, spurring my horse in the ribs and bounding so quickly I almost lost my balance.

Side by side we rode through that blinding windstorm, through that avalanche of water (I had never seen it rain this hard in the islands) as it we were in a steeple chase, me taking the lead, falling back, riding on the flanks of his stallion which shone in the water like a wave petrified when it turns to surf, then prodding until I gained the lead again.

Once I heard Suny laugh, a long happy laugh, like a pagan in the furls of paradise.

He was Paris, riding Pagesus along that wet Mediterranean coast.

He reined his horse in through a narrow gate to a dilapidated fence which corraled the barn and under a shabby lean to. I followed suit, and came to a halt so abruptly, my stallion slid to his haunches.

Tieing our mounts, we took the remaining food from our saddlebags and, drenched through and through, climbed a rickety ladder up into the loft.

The ash gray shingled roof leaked in a number of places, there were lengths of corn an red pepper strung along the walls, abandoned by their keepers, a pile of straw overlooking a loft door long robbed of its door, but it was primeval paradise to me. Outside was the storm, the wind, the world, but here, the air thick with the odor of mould and olden hay, I was alone with Suny.

"What a storm!" he said excitedly, as if he was enjoying the whole afair (and I was). "Boy – what a storm!"

"Reminds me of Bougainville," I said tactfully, knowing he always relished my talk about the war, the Marines. "It rained for forty days and nights there, just like in the Bible. I can remember sleeping in foxholes on my back and the next morning water would be up above my ears, and between my helmet and my head there would be dozens of snails."

"Your kidding," he laughed, his water filled face like that of Neptune, breaking up from the waves, his riot of curls dangling about his emerald eyes in a way that took him out of time, in the beyond somewhere, into that realm of Gods and immortals.

I laughed too.

"No – I'm not kidding. Not once was I ever completely dry on that sloppy island, and our rifles turned green from mold and some of the boys almost died with jungle rot."

He looked at me askew.

"What is jungle rot?"

"It is an itch, like ringworm, which you get if you sit in the mud of ir your clothes stay wet for a long time and your body cannot get a chance to dry."

"Did you get it?"

"No – I would always sit on my havershack."

"Clever – clever," he joked, his eyes sparkling like wet marbles on mine. Then his face took on a serious expression. "I guess we had better get out of these clothes – jungle rot – you know." He laughed again, almost in a foolish way, the train, the cool barnloft, the vigor of his youth, his health provoking his mirth.

Nature, the elements, is a breeder of moods, and one who has lived on a farm, close to earth, in the out of doors, are dictated to by these whimical changes in nature, though they are not aware of it. Nature, to them, is not a backdrop like a canvas painting. They walk through nature, they are dominated by its presence, are swayed by its directness and by its aurora.

I am one of those people. Nature will not let me alone. The sun burns upon me like a noon day torch. The wind lashes at me. The rain, like a driving force upon the folded bud of a flower, and me that bud, must be conquered in order to conquer. My petals must be ripped open by the whip of the rain, destroyed, before I will open them willingly.

And there on this stormwashed evening, driven into this abandoned roof, this birds nest in the sky, as I had been driven that first wild night Norman had beaten me, as I had sought shelter in the house of Luther, later to be gashed in the heart by his ardent love. On that wind driven nigth on Christmas eve, on that dark cavern of the ocean with Stanly, in the sunny

tides the day Myrka died, in the mouth of a volcano when Cisco lay in a pool of his own blood and now – this moment – this dark, suntanned God, more beautiful to me than all the works of art, more dark of limb, more savage of contenance than any warrior, more perfect than any statue, was standing before me in this abandoned shelter far from home, a storm hurling itself out of our world, was pulling off his clothes!

As unconcerned as a child who does not know even the rudiments of modesty, he stripped completely naked, and carefully lay his wet clothes over the ceiling beams of the barn. Innocently, still like a child, he leaned against the doorfacing of the loft's window, and looked out at the tossing world of water and wind.

The pale subluminous light, stealing in through the sails of rain, lay upon his body, the light quivering like the mad intoxication of my heart, playing out its shadows along his limbs, along his dark chest, along his midsection, as the light sometimes will play along a swimming pool when the sun breaks the water and casts the shadow of the waves upon marble.

Like a medium of the stone age, immune to the world, the universe, everything except this boy standing in that pale halo of light, I kept my glass-like eyes hypnotized on him, though I pretended to be busy unlacing my raider boots which I had brought home from the war, sitting on the spread of lemon yellow hay, looking up at him with the identical adoration in which I might behold God.

He was that to me, and more – much more. God promised nothing but salvation in return for his love. Suny promised love in turn for salvation. He also promised madness. Madness with a gentle touch of purity. He was both angel and devil, or, he was the angel and I was the devil. Yet, I saw both heaven and hell in the young, dark, body perched at the edge of the sky. I saw virginity and lust. I saw monogamy with him and also virtue, and with that monogamy the dread of monophobia, the dread of losing him and being left alone.

"The rain is slacking up," he said peacefully, breaking my spell. "But it will be dark before long. We could stay the night here. We have plenty of food."

"Let's do," I said as calmly as I could, thanking the

stars for his casual invitation. Had he handed it to me embossed in gold I would not have been more pleased.

Let the darkness cover us. Let me hear his breathing beside me, and I would not ask anything else of the world.

Give youth love and beauty and the world can keep its wisdom..

I looked up at him standing there, his eyes picking out objects of interest on the wet horizon, and I wondered why he had stripped completely naked this evening, on this occasion, this moment, when he had never stripped before. That I should harbor the thought that he was thinking along the lines I was thinking, I instinctively knew that he was not. Such things had never occurred then. Then why?

The only conclusion I could draw was that if he had stripped naked during our posing and painting sessions it would have called attention to his loins, his genitals. Yet, here, it was as with any other boy, stripping to go in swimming, to change into a football uniform, to dress for track, stripping without placing emphasis on nudity – stripping for necessity. This conclusion only heightened my admiration for him, for behind that simple gesture I truly saw his genuine virtue, his natural innocence.

The sky outside, the light through the spasmodical drops of water, was slowly darkening now and the shadows were longer, darker, and their multitudes flung Suny's body into a gory medulla of sex.

My eyes dragged down his body, when he never suspected I was looking, and halted in the area of his crotch, where they lingered longingly. His savagely dark patch of public hair embossed hi loins like the hair on his head, with oily sheens, curled and waved into matts, like dark sea waves crashing upon rocks. Nature had given to Suny what most men were denied, an organ which was also a weapon – his most cherished, most useful weapon. He was built like a battering man.

He moved from his reverie and came and sat down beside me, rather reclined, his dark shapely legs, with their pelt of wiry black hair, crossed deligently, his thick arms, bulging with muscle, thrust up and behind his head. Like Norman that long ago time, he chewed on a straw.

"Do you think the sketch is ruined?" he asked lowly, seriously, staring at the gray ceiling which looked like it had been marked with chalk.

I came out of my deep, sensuous mood.

"I think not – hope not. It is wrapped in the oil cloth dispatch case. Besides, water won't harm a pencil sketch."

"Oh," he said, contentedly. "Sure glad. The masterpieces of all masterpieces." He turned then and looked at me. "Hungry?"

"A little bit," I nodded.

He pulled the lunchbox over between us and handed me a sandwich, taking one for himself, then poured us each a canteen up of milk.

"Would you tell me something?" he asked shyly, pointing with a finger. "If you do not want to, then you do not have to, understand?"

"I understand," I assured him, my mouth filled with food.

"That star on your cheek. Why did you have it tattooed there? I have often wondered. It bothers me."

I swallowed hard. I did not want to uproot the agonies of the past, to open doors I had closed forever. I could not answer directly.

"Oh – I am sorry," he said, hanging his head.

My mind was on the wind driven plains of Iwo Jima, but I came back to present day reality.

"Don't be sorry," I managed to say. "It's – it's all old bitterness of mine – something that happened to me I would like to forget."

He was silent for a moment.

"It is there to remind you – of something?"

"Like a scar, I suppose, when you look into a mirror."

He came back quickly, his interest alerted.

"Is it that bad, Rex? To remind you, yet make you want to forget."

I turned me head and looked out the loft window. How could I tell this virtuous person what happened to me on Guadalcanal? What would he think? What would he think of me, and the Marines? Yet, how could I deny this noblest of all human beings to me. Had he asked, I would have given him the moon.

"Some things just happen to people they cannot help," I tried to explain, without explaining really. "We are

trapped by things where there are no laws to protect us, and we must accept, regardless, the heartbreak to ourselves. It is like a sacrifice we give, but give unwillingly. Do you understand what I mean?"

The shadows of the raindrops, falling from the eves outside, strung down his face and made him look deathly sad.

His voice stammered.

"I understand that something – or someone – has done something very terrible to you and even to talk about it makes you uncomfortable. But I am your friend, Rex, for life, and I want to know everything about you, everything that happened to you in the war."

"Why do you want to know these things?" I came back quickly.

His masterful eyes were on mine, burning into mine, probing out things I wished to remain hidden, and there was tears at the corners of them, sparkling in the wet light like bits of seed pearls.

"Because I want to know what you have suffered over there, so I can suffer too, so I can be a part of your suffering. Is this too much to ask?"

My eyes on him were filled with deep longing, not longing for his body, but for his heart, his mind. He was country, born and reared in country, but there was nothing about him of country ignorance. Behind that bland face, there dwelled an intelligent brain, and behind those muscles ribs lay an amiable heart. But no wonder, his mother and father were graduates of Millsaps College in Jackson, one on the very few colleges in the United States which was listed as a recommended college for students of Oxford-On-Avon in England. But his intelligence went beyond the mere knowledge of books. His spirit was deep, profound. Had I had the sense to of realized it, he had cut his teeth on my heart.

"Do you think you will like me as much after I tell you?" I asked, with fathomless seriousness, my heart racing with time.

His eyes told me my answer, more than the intonations of his words.

"Nothing in the world that you have done could turn me away from you, against you, nor keep us from being friends."

I looked at him sadly, wondering if I should open those doors of corruption for him, to take him through and into that other world of depravity, which would lead him on and onto deathless loneliness. Or should I let him keep his virtue, his ignorance of that world, to run the risk of another, someone less brutal than I, would someday open them for him and I would lose him in that quickmire of him losing himself.

For his sake, for is own guidance, for I loved him with all there is in loving, I must tell him. I must tell him frankly, even if by that telling, I will lose his respect for me, perhaps his love, surely his admiration.

"Suny," I tried to begin, lying on my back, my eyes trailing the shingles on the roof where I could distinguish faint cracks of light. "There are some things men do – do with other men, sexual things, which you know nothing of, which will sound horrid to you, shameful."

"I've heard things at school," he interrupted, fingering the stems of straw.

"What things?" I cried, shocked.

"Oh, about what some men pick up boys for in Jackson, how they offer them money to – to ah do things."

"You mean you hear things like that at Florence High. I never did."

Despite my experience, I was appalled.

"Things have changed since you went to school, Rex. Why some of the boys I know hitch rides to Jackson just so they can get picke up!"

I trembled like a thief.

"Have they –?" I could not help but ask.

"Never, he answered proudly, "and they never will."

"Well," I continued with the telling, at ease now over the confessions of his innocence. "Some of the marines on Guadalcanal did things to me – sexual things. I mean they forced me, took me against my will."

"What things?" he cried, seeming to demand to know.

I told him, in as brief and as terse words as I could muster. When I was finished a heavy silence fell between us. My hopes were dashed like a stone thrown at birds.

He pounded his fists against the bed of straw. The barn shook with the vibrations of his strength – and his wrath.

"The bastards." " he swore (it was the first time I had ever heard him use profanity, even the word damn.) "They did this to you – and you with so much talent, so fine, so good. God! Now I hate the marines, hate the war, hate every marine who ever wore that uniform. I will never join them now – now or never!"

"You must not feel this way," I said, trying to alter his impression hopeful of restoring his faith in an organization he had all but worshipped.

"Must I not!" he stormed, and in my defense. "To be a part of them, who have done this to you. I could never hold my head up – for shame."

He bent over, his face hidden in the frame of his dark curly hair, and his shoulders shook. I had stabbed him in the heart.

"Suny," I whispered, taking hold of his arm. I shook him to gain his attention. He raised his head and looked at me. "Do you hold this agains time?" I quivered at the possibility.

"No! No! not you, them! them!" he muttered, trying not to sob. Life had reached out and grabbed him, the filth of life, soiling his clean mind, pouring mud into that crystal globe.

"You must not hold them – the marines I means, you must not hold them to blame," I went on, desperately, driving for answers I could not find myself, probing blindly into the recesses of my past. "I want you to know something. I want you to hear it from me, from my lips, will you listen to me, will you believe me?"

He was quiet for a moment, regaining his calm, then he said, "yes," and his eyes said yes again and again, burning their way into my memory of those times on Guadalcanal.

"The marines – and I know – the marines are the finest, most courageous, most loyal men I have ever known – truly they are. And I love the marines, Suny, despite what happened to me. For it was but a few who – who raped me there that night, and on that Christmas Eve, but a few compared to all those who fought, who died to save our country. You can not blame the marines as a whole for what happened. I do not, not really, even if what did happen happened to me. And you must not blame the others either, for they are what they are, and cannot help themselves. Besides," and I muttered the

words, driven back on the tides of memory, the memory of that wild, deplorable night. “They were durnk, Suny, drunk on beer and drunk on fear and drunk on war. You must foregive them, as I forgave them long ago.”

His eyes were filled with water but they were steadily on mine, and he choked, fighting a wild onrush of tears.

“I will try and understand,” he said, halfheartedly, “but why did it have to be you. Why didn’t they see you as I see you, your talent, your goodness, always your your goodness – why, when I remember when I was little and you would always see to it that I had a place to sit, and always saw to it that I got on the bus in the evenings – why, why I owe my life to you. I really do. And I keep asking, why – why you?”

That was a hard question for me to answer.

My eyes deluded his, and I looked again through the loft window at the night invading the countryside, the long level shadows looming together, merging into darkness.

“Because,” I said, haunted by the thought. “Because —I was small, like a girl to them, I suppose, They did not enjoy it, not really. They did it only for a thrill, a careless word, a gesture, a prank turning them into a mob. Anyway,” and I sighed. “It is all over – and forgotten.”

“So you tattooed yourself tor their crimes against you,” he added, a little sarcastic. “Like the puritan women, with the scarlet S painted on their garments.

“Perhaps,” I agreed. “Or, as a holy medal, reminding me that the crime was not mine – but theirs. I wear it proudly.”

Our lowered voices ebbed to silence. The dying wind, tailing the monster of the storm, stole in through the numerous cracks in the loft and rattled the loose boards like the bones of skeletons. The straw beneath us trembled, as it a magic carpet trying to take wings. Outside, the land lay under a blanket of darkness, slumbering now after the storm, the frogs in the puddles, still unsatisfied, singing to their tiny green rain God for more summer showers. A cricket, safe in the dark abode of the loft ceiling, set up a chorus of peep – peep – peeps, making the silence stiller, or our presence in so alien a world infinitely small.

“Rex,” Suny whispered, his dark body now, radiant

in his nakedness, changing colors with the darkness, a savage outline against the faint gold of the hay. “Do you ever – do you ever want – to do those things again – I mean – not rape – but –.” His voice trailed off in embarrassment.

I remained silent, not able to speak, my mind catching the impact of his words and daring to capitalize on them.

“I hate to ask that,” he came back sadly, after the long interval of my not answering.

“That was not why I did not answer right off,” I said absently, plying my words into thoughts which could be used at best advantage. “It’s just – just that not wanting it – rather – wanting it, I suppose, if there was tenderness with the other. That is – if I met a person who was willing – who wanted to – but without the rape that went with it.”

“Then you have wanted to – since – since the war?”

I heard him breathe uneasily.

“I – I have thought about,” I said slowly, letting him quess at my words.

He breathed again, this time with a jerk, as if he had fallen.

“We like each other, we could if – if say no one else ever, I would, just for you.”

I knew now that the Gods were looking.

“It would be wrong, Suny,” I said, and with truth, but in such a way as to put me in the angels seat. “You should be with girls, to marry someday, rear children. If we did this, if it turned you wrong, if it came to hurt you in some way, I would want someone to put a rope around my neck and hang me frm the tallest pine.”

“Would it be against God?” he imposed the essential question, letting out his lifeline like a rope letting a bucket into a well, hopeful of drawing water, yet hopeful of not filling it so full he could not pull it up.

“I lost your God in the islands,” I said, in a dense whisper. “My God now is the God of love and beauty. Perhaps they are still the same God, yet, we call them by different names – mine is nameless. But if God dwells at all he dwells in nature – and that is beauty. So who is to say what he is for and against.”

“If I did this to you – with tenderness – not painfully like the marines,” he uttered, closer now, so close I

could fell the radiation of his naked limbs near mine, " would you never – never let another boys, or man do it?"

My heart was filled with arrows.

"But you would be sacrificing so much – what about your own likes, your girls, what about them?"

"They do not matter," he came back swiftly, like a rapier with a sharp sword. "It is you that matters. You have suffered enough, and I want to do something for you – something that will make you happy."

I turned and his face, his silhuette was so near me, directly over me that the loft window was but a dimly-lit frame, a sliver of luminous light edging his body. He placed his head against my face, his arms going under my shoulders, pulling me slowly, surely, maddeningly to him, moulding us together, the heat of our bodies rampant with our quick breathing, our sighs, our joys which were surely to come.

He was taking me back to my lost boyhood, my old wounds healing in the balm of his nearness, the love which was in his young heart rebuiding my faith in mankind, and I had lost that faith somewhere in the islands, on Iwo Jima, or Guam, or on Guadalcanal, I had not remembered, and now I wanted it back. I needed that faith now if I was to cope with him in the future, needed that courage which goes hand in hand with faith if I was to give myself to him. He had sacrificed everything for me, and I must give him all of myself in return, not just a shell, not just my body, but my heart and my soul.

From the tides of war I knew my ship was sinking, and I was overwhelmed that the things I deemed so precious in my earlier youth no longer held any prominence. I had thrown overboard these wonderous things – respect, loyalty, nobility, all the things Suny possessed, and I feared I could never retrieve them. But Suny's warm love reached out and was bringing them to me once more, the flotsam and jetsam of my pride, my vanity, my haughty ways. With him to love me in the future, a pure love, untarished, a love which would glisten by the constant furbishing of our love making, our constant companionship, the old wounds would heal, the old torments, the old memories vanishing with his lips on mine. To love the pure is a thousandfold more

respendent than loving the undevout, and Suny, in his untried youth, his wholesome beauty, was more intoxicating than the sexiest reprobate.

That he was utterly young, robustly healthy, that he was pure inside, that he was ignorant of the pillage and plunder of the soul, was the most ardent lover. His touch was like the hand of God reaching down from that farm far off heaven to pull you up and fold you in his wings.

I felt his hand slip down my shoulder, my hip, turning me over on my stomach, knew that the coils within him were untightening, flooding every latitude in his body, every inch of him pulsating like a straining machine, like steam boilers ready to burst, the volatile sap in his loins quickening his breath, maddening hm with speed, with driving emotion. So powerful was his obsession, he could have squeezed out my life in a single grip, so powerful his passion made him. Never was he stronger, nor more endowed with strength – almost superhuman, nor never was he more tender. The same hands, tipped with passion, that could have snuffed out my life, caressed me as though they were lined with velvet. His mouth at the nap of my neck, sliding against me like hot oil, could have had in its confines the ferocity of a slobbering Tiger, could have ripped my juglar vein with one sharp thrust, yet a lamb at its mothers breast could not have provoked more tenderness.

Though his drive was rampant, he hesitated. His admiration for me as a person, his hero impression, was checking his passions. He was holding back on the reins, wary of sending his sex drive into a full gallop.

Too, he was waiting for my word.

"Suny, take me – please," I whisphered, my soul heaved up by my every word. "I want you – I will always want you."

Like a trained animal obeying its master he mounted me. Every nerve in my body shot me like a shortage in an electrical current, the volts veining out, tipping the walls of my body, even to the outer layer of my skin, my body a spider's web of hot wires circling, strung taut, quivering as though they lashed each other to frenzy in a storm. Yet, I loved every sensation his body administered to mine. It was gaining on me, threatening to attack and consume my deepest passions,

threatening to master me.

His own body took on the ferocity of a savage, his strength hardening, his thighs, his buttocks, his chest like monstrous stones heaped upon me. Yet, the hands that pulled at me, stroked me, were like silken paws, his hot lips which, when turning my head completely around to kiss me, drew on my strength like the siphoning of wine.

His body, his doing, dominated me, mastered me, just as his innocence, his simpleness of heart, a few moments before had mastered me. His personality was stronger than mine. It, like his body, his sex, dragged me down, imposing upon me the one thing in the world which was making him master – his gift for fulfilling joy. The brutality of Norman, the clumsiness of Maurice, the perfection of Luther, the depravity of Cisco, the boyishness of Myrka, the hunger of Stanley, all, were no more than childish hyperboles compared to this powerful novice turned professional. Professional, because, perhaps unlike them, his aim was not the ultimate of pleasing only himself. He was giving me his body as a gift, the most precious thing one person can give another, and with that gift he was giving everything of himself. The whole of his being united and poured like a broken flood through his loins and into me. I could feel the abandoning of his muscles, his every sinew, and thrilled in that swift loosening. Knew that his thighs and the corded layers along his stomach were turning to the hardness of steel, that every vein within him was drawing in their lines, tightening, as if he was bound with staves could feel the tightening and relaxing of his jaws, the wild lash of his tongue on mine and the glorious sap in his even more glorious body slipped out of his life and into mine.

In that aftermath he began to cry, softly at first, then in a series of jerks, hugging me close, his hands over my face, his lips against my lips, his whole body in convulsive shakes.

I could not speak. I was drowned in the great dark power of his love, the immediate recollection of his dark body on mine, the glowinng memory of the last hour – the memory of his body, like molten gold poured over me, wrappinng me in an aureoled coccoon of profound rapture.

"Don't – don't ever leave me," he sobbed, his tears running down my face, blending with my tears.

Now, at last, he was mine. I had dreamed, had aspired, had even lusted for him, coveted his body in my mind, my heart, my own body, coveting it silently – waiting – waiting. Now, in a moment or in an amphere or an aeon, he had surrendered to me. Or, was it I who had surrendered to him? But what matter. He was mine, and he would be mine always. Our bodies had become identical pillars in the same temple. We were bound to one another, and I knew this instinctively, as bound, or more so than those with written contracts of love, or marriage. We were bund by something stronger, and stranger, and more wonderous than the words from God, as if we were fetted with invisible chains, locked in a metorphorous older than legacy.

The faith, the loyalty that was his creed, the devotion, the love which was mine, would hold us together – would keep us from ever drifting apart. We had made a vow with our bodies. We would never break that vow. It was too holy for him, too precious for me.

So, in the remainder of that summer, we walked in a sunlight tipped with gold. The world was an old haunted garden. I was a flamelet, a glittering, flickering swallow-tailed butterfly and Suny was a full blossomed, garish flower of rich amber. I pulled at his love like a dark bee that pulls at a long stemmed rosebud, dragging it to the ground. My insect heart fluttering, he silky wings of my love sifting dust of pollen on our world which grew and abandoned itself from all aspects of that other life. We became independent of all things – of everyone – except ourselves.

Then, at times, he would be the dark tiger dragging me into his lair, crushing my gilded wings and, always, there would be an afterglow of sobs. Always, whenever he had me, he sobbed as the love dust of our love settled over us.

But that love inspired me. It gave me ambition. I completed his painting, and it framed, and hung it over my bed in my own room at Subrosa, a bed which I now rarely occupied. The summerhouse had become our home now, in part, our abode beneath the leaf, our habitation beneath the toadstool in this our hanuted fair world.

CHAPTER 10

I wrote a short novel about science fiction, my truly first love, having lived on the glory, the heroic figures Alex Raymond had created of Flash Gordon during my green years (his works had been my Bible when I was growing up) and I did over a hundred illustrations of my story, detailed pen and ink renderings with Suny posing as the central figure. Those were glorious times, and when the book was finished, he and I wrapped the manuscript and the drawing for mailing and went together down to the mail box which stood on the main road and mailed them to a publisher.

That fall, he went back to Florence high, his last year, and, not getting to see as much of him, his track, his javelin throwing, and football practice dominating his time, I threw myself into my work, my ambition as an illustrator, and turned out a pictorial map for the State of Mississippi. I was well paid, the circulation of the colorful map thrusting my artwork before the public eye, and attractive offers began to pour in. The State of Louisiana wanted to commission me to cartoon a mural of the State's history. They had seen examples of my work and recognized my knowledge of the history of the South, pamphlets and traveloges, and annual reports which I had illustrated and even texted for the State of Mississippi. I knew the history of the southern states by heart, could follow every skirmish of the Civil War, and could detail without research all the wearing attire, guns, artillery, harness, and homes and furnishings of that period – even as far as back De Soto, Cortez, and earlier, even of the Indian nations – the Chickasaws, the Choctaws, the Tishimingos.

I hated to leave Suny in that luxurious garden, in those hay fields gleaming like new minted gold where he labored in blue jeans, shirtless and barefoot, in those starry nights whenever we camped out in the open, in the summer house lying naked on the clean starched sheets, in the fields breaking land for planting, the chickens trotting after us to grab the choicest worms. In those dark emerald woods, haunted by the hollow love call of doves, but I had to pursue my gifted ambition and prodded into a decision by my eternal lust for prestige, I decided after the Christmas holidays to

come to Baton Rouge.

On the last night before my departure, my suitcases packed, by small body elegant in my dark suit, my wine colored top-coat, I went to say farewell momentarily to Suny – and his family.

He was at a football game when I arrived and Jesse, his father showed me into the living room where he and Delta were seated eating popcorn and watching the hearthfire send out its warm gold. They were the ultimate to me, mainly because they had sired Suny, and they liked me in return. In fact, had once asked me to move my things into the summerhouse with Suny, but I had refused. I knew Suny loved his freedom, his moments of solitude, and I did not want to strain our relationship with my constant presence.

"But he loves you," Delta had pleaded, standing there in the upper hall of their split level ranch house." And he is lonely. He has never had many friends – not close – not like you."

But, wayward with my regard for keeping Suny forever, I turned down the ticket into paradise.

"So, your going to Baton Rouge, Louisiana," Jesse said loudly – he always spoke loudly, boisterous, as he mentioned for me to occupy a leather hassock beside the hickory fire. "To red stick – and going to leave us and Suny behind – us poor folks."

He laughed.

"Not for long," I explained. "I will be coming back. This will always be my home – here and at Subrosa."

"We are glad you feel this way," Delta said softly, offering me a wooden bowl of popcorn, which I took politely and began to eat. "We feel," she went on, "that you are a part of the family, kin to us in a way I suppose, and you are certainly closer to Suny than any of his cousins in Macon, or at Flora for that matter. He has never mixed much with anyone except you, and he – we are going to miss you."

"I exchanged feelings, and assure then I would return by Easter, that they would soon tire of seeing me and my suitcases on their front steps.

"Nonsense," Jesse snorted, bolting his glass of beer mountain fashion. "We want you to go to Baton Rouge, and make good and come back and keep in touch. We want it. Suny wants it."

"He is all we have, Rex," Delta said, and in the firelight her elfish face, her eyes, radiated a kind of tragic sadnes. "He loves you dearly, always has, even when he was a tot going to grammar school, always saying Rex did this and Rex did that, and he practically worships your mother and father. Truly, I think it is a wonderful thing, to care for someone all your life, to look up to them, to be inspired by them." She nibbled at her bowl of popcorn, then continued. "I had a teacher once whom I adored, just as Suny adores you, and I will never forget her. True, she never did anything outstanding, but there was greatness within her. You could feel that greatness. She would make things around her seem out of the ordinary. She gave a special touch to everything. You could not be common around her. She would not let you. She made the glow in her glow in others, and I always felt more important when I was with her." She paused and glanced through the wide glass wall paneling as if expecting someone out of the darkness. "Perhaps – maybe Suny feels this way about you."

"It is nice to be wanted – to be needed." I corrected myself, and at the stumbling of words my, fingers trembled over the popcorn,

"So, your going to paint the history of Louisiana," Jesse said hoarsely, changing the subject. He was a physical man by nature and his presence dominated a room. "That is going to take some painting. All the alligators and Creole women and Cajuns and swamps and moss and tohe strippers on Bourbon street."

We all laughed nervusly, and Delta got up from her chair and started for the kitchen.

"Well – if the conversation is going to get around to naked women then I'll leave."

She went up the redwood steps and onto the carpted foyer.

"Baby come back," Jesse yelled, extending his glass of beer, "that is, when you bring me another can."

She halted at the hallway entrance, her hands on her hips, her face trying to smother a smile.

"You're in your cups already," she chidded. "And the talk of naked women will have you as tipsy as a duck."

Me implored greedily, masquerading at drunkenness.

"Just one more – me love – for the hair of the dog."

We all laughed uproariously.

Delta shook her fists playfully at him then disap. peared into the kitchen.

Whenever she was safely beyond earshot, Jessie turned puzzling eyes to me.

"So Mar's takes leave of Paris," he said gloatingly, I thought, though there was no sarcasm in the deep rough sound of his voice.

"I don't understand." I tried to keep my eyes steadily on his.

"Oh, Rex, my boy," he laughed softly, slapping me on the legs. "Don't understand! Do you think I give a damn if Suny likes you. Hell no, boy, it's his life."

My face flushed to crimson.

He had me cornered.

"Did Suny?" I blurted out. though instantly realizing it was the most stupid question I could have asked.

"He didn't have to," Jesse answered, though kindly, hiss bass boice exceptionally thoughtful. "Two boys don't stay off somewhere in a barn at night just to count the number of straws in a haystack."

I blushed again, remembering that wild night in which I had gloried. Yet, his accusations ruffled my feathers.

"There was a rainstorm," I protested, defending Suny and me, and to the death if necessary.

"A rainstorm-ha! Suny was born in the rain. He has played in the rain all his life. He could even swim be- fore he could walk. Got you there, hadn't I?"

I twisted in my seat. Things were coming off badly, and after such a glorious summer with Suny.

Then he looked at me remorsely, and the firelight played in his eyes like he had been playing with me but a moment before.

"Rex, listen, I want my boy to be happy, whatever he wants to do. I want the same thing for him. Both Delta and me. If he wants you as his lover then I say – hell – go to it. Boy, I was in Germany myself dur- ing the war. You did not fight all the battles. I've been around. I know what queers are, do you think I'm blind. Do you think I care? Hell, those Krauts made me, sure they did, don't look so surprised, and I liked it. Yes, I liked it, and I don't give a fiddlers damn who knows it."

"So you know," I said, still stunned by his last words.

"I guess you hate me now. I guess you have no respect for Suny." My body became a small fury. "Hate me if you will, but you can't hate Suny. It was all my fault. I – I made him do it."

The world came crashing down about me, and bravely, courageously, I lifted my tear rimmed eyes to his. His were morose, full of old pain.

"No – I don't hate you," he said lowly, as though he said it far off, and it took a long time for his voice to reach me. "And I don't disrespect my boy. You both got passion and that's the size of it. So, your starting something neither of you want to finish. Well, it's your life and his," he shrugged. "And – if it makes him happy, then I am happy. I understand – I really understand, and I don't mind what I understand. Suny is a good boy. He's all man, so are you. He does what I ask him to, is perfect around the farm, and this is his home as long as he wants to stay, and that goes for you too. What you both do out at the summerhouse is your business."

The world came back to me and in the firelit eyes that traced mine, I saw into that deep well of his understanding. He was giving me permission to live with his son, and giving it proudly. That lavender world of anarchy, the one I did not know of now, but would know of later, had penetrated the borderline of his laws, his reed, and he was one of us, if only momentarily, if only in a vague sense. In the deep understanding of his son and of me, he had crossed another border of his life. He had lifted a veil which may have never been lifted at all. His cup runneth over with truth, and that truth lit the darkest places within me. He was accepting, and was making the most, of an actuality.

And I thought: If all men could be like him, if all men could reach out beyond their own personal understanding, their private comprehension, then for those like me and Suny, those bound by invisible laws and invisible creeds, the world could open up.

"Does Delta know?" I probed, desperate now to know in full measure the unlocking of the doors of mine and Suny's world.

"From the beginning," he answered casually, "and like me, it does not matter. Let's say no more about the situation. Now hush, for here she comes."

She made her way gracefully down the steps, her arms loaded with a try of freshly popped corn and drinks tingling in ice.

"Suny will be here in half an hour, so I went ahead and popped enough for us all. Here, puss, is your beer!"

When Suny returned at last, flushed by the vivid exercise in the night's football game, but fresh from a re cent cold shower, and looking like a cigarette ad in his fluffy white turtle neck sweater and jeans, we all four sat around the flickering fire and talked, tossing phrases back and forth, bickering, Jesse kidding Suny about Florence High losing the game, Delta rationalizing, until the firelogs burned down to coals and the clock struck one in the hall.

The night, my last night before departing for Louisiana, was made perfect, a moated heaven whose defenses as soon fall. Yet, this night was a forerunner of many such nights I was to share with the Martin's in the future, and up to this writing. The knowledge was out in the open, aired, and hearts that love keep loving, but when Suny and I had said good night and retreated to the summerhouse and after undressing for bed, he had wanted more popcorn, so I insisted that I go back to the main house for it. When I cross the foyer and into the kitchen (I had always had free run of the house) I happened to glance through the doorway and saw Delta sitting in the dining room alone. She sat in the darkness, with only the kitchen lights on, and I could see the sheen of her hair as she sat slumped over the dining table, her head in her hands, weeping quietly.

I hurried back to the summerhouse, forgetting momentarily what I had come after, and upon entering the bedroom saw sadly Suny sitting up in bed.

"Where's my popcorn?" he asked readily, as I neared the bed.

"Why – I – there isn't any more," I lied, stammering. "And your mother has gone to bed."

I pulled off my clothes, wondering sadly what had made her cry, and suspicioning that it concerned Suny and me in some enshadowed way. I eased into bed beside him.

"Still hate the marines?" I asked softly, trying to push the incident at the house with Delta to the back of my mind.

"No – I guess no," he said, smiling faintly.

He continued to thumb through the pages, he and I together looking at the newspaper clippings he and my mother had collected during the war and had glued into the album.

"I want you to do something for me," he asked warmly, turning to face me, his emerald eyes so soft on mine I would have promised anything.

"It is a long way to go and bring you back the moon," I chidded, plucking him under the chin.

"No," he said, seriously. "it's nothing like that."

"What then?" I asked, taking up his rueful mood.

"When you have time, in Baton Rouge, I want you to write your life story – about the marines – especially about the marines, and what they did to you."

I turned to him with a puzzled frown on my face.

"What on earth why?"

"Because—I want the world to know how – how awful they treated you."

He let the album slid to the carpet, and, taking me into his arms, he swallowed me with his kisses.

"God, how I love you!" he whispered.

Then he switched off the light.

CHAPTER 11

In Baton Rouge, I plunged into the newly found exhilaration of my work, giving all my talent to this necessitated project, one in which I gloried. I had thought that Mississippi had a colorful history, with its Spanish invaders, its Indians descending from the Incas, but Lousiana unfurled from pirmeval times to the present in an unending banner, infiltrating her boundaries with the French, Spanish, German, Chinese (an entire coat village of Chinese) Swedish, Polock, from which transcended in the years to come the Creole, the Cajun, the Koon-ass, and, to many more. What magic it's history conjured. The more I labored with my cartoons, life size, which were to be transferred later to blank walls in one of the more popular museums, the more I realized that I had only brushed its cavalcades of history. I did extensive research, determined to produce my murals in as accurate a representation as my mind and my talents would allow. Took every pamphlet, every history book, every tourist guide, every brochure from archives and history home with me at night and studied them until I knew Louisiana as well as I knew my native State. The more I worked, the longer the hours in which I gathered this needed knowledge from the past. The more I saw in the montage of history, its relics, its storehouses of antiques, its ancient volumes, its preserved architecture, the more it grew into me, the more I wanted to remain here and make it home. Too, the people were avidly hospitabl, going out of their way to bring me a book, some leaflet of historical value, some family heirloom which I might use in my work which was designed with the thought in mind to last through the ages. They volunteered their services, drove me to remote places, to cherished landmarks, to arsenals, to old battlefields, to abandoned cemeteries, to half-burried ante-bellum homes shrouded in moss. To shingled cabins in the swamps, to farms, plantations, to towns and to cities. These people were proud of their state, their heritage, proud to be in on his gorgeous parade of swashbuckling men and demure women, and working with them, listening to them relate its wonders, their Cajun accents chopping their words, their mixture of other languages, French, Spanish, infiltrating their

conversations, their eyes rolling, their hands flung in gestures, in cadence to their stories touched my heart with a kind of aged intoxication making me a little tipsy as I tried to join into the whirling pattern of their lives.

They were a mixture of many nationalities, Catholicism. their dominate religion, but the results of their mixture was of so blendful a concorction, they seem as one thorough race. Like their gumbos, partaking of everything, yet once in the boiling pot, melting as one. Unlike the central Mississippians with their ancient laws, their stead disciplinary creeds, ther moral standards, their death before dishonor, their unwritten sacraments, which were more rigidly obeyed than their written ones, those people were a bit reckless, a little wild, never to be completely tamed. Their dark complexions, their raven black hair and eyes, their thirst for plasure, their untiring lust for the passions, for party giving, for life under the lights, made of them a fascinat people, and in short time I grew to like and admire them immensely. The freedom with which they lived, the abandonment of their properties, the play now, suf~ fer later, epitome of their attitudes, was akin in some strange way to the nonconformist ideals of my own life, and I fit into their easy going ways.

I found an apartment on Lafayette street, almost in the heart of Baton Rouge, which faced the Mississippi river westward and turned its back upon the Capitol building which rose out of the East. A gray spire piercing the limpidity of the southern blue sky like a sword of the vanquished, its hilt, a series of wings emblazoned with the statues of naked Gods and ancient heroes – a perfect foil for the anarchy of my life to come.

The apartment was old, which made it all the more attractive to me, it that old frilly iron work which the quarter in New Orleans is famous, and was two stories in height, lending me the advantage point of standing on its ancient gallery and watching the foreign ships slip up the river and anchor in the harbor, bringing even a more reckless army into this reckless city of play. The stuccoed walls had been sand blasted, the iron grill work touched with a soft flat green, like old copper, and the long, many-paned windows were framed in matching green shutters. Pot plants sat here and there on the

gallery, which I would add to later, and the steps going down to the streets were of maroon tile, giving me the air of Valentino in my tight black Italian suit and I came and went in those romantic shadows. I had collected Venetial glassware, states, odd shaped and odd colored ash trays, (though I did not smoke), since high school days. A number of pieces of furniture, mainly white leather of lacquered black and I had them shipped in from Florence.

During my spare time, I painted the floors black, and in the center of these dark seas, which reflected like mirrors at night, I painted circle motiffs taken from designs either from Flash Gordon or from my own science fiction novel. I was busy constantly, arranging furniture, buying additional pieces, shopping for a vase, a statute, a lamp (I have always loved eautiful lamps with colored bulbs in them. When I was not at the Capitol working on the state's mural, I was busy painting the walls of my apartment – jungle plants bending gracefully from corner of the wall, underwater scenes in the white tiled bath, Mermaids Mermen, Roman Gods, Dragons, ancient ruins, until the mortar walls looked more like a museum than an apartment. The bed, I covered with a huge circle rug of black fur, like a Vikings bed of the Njord, and sprinkled it with a wild array of silken pillows. In one alcove, I created an Egyptian motiff, with a statue of Nefraditti, an ash tray shaped like Cleopatria's barge, and ebony table, a white leather hassock, with reliefs of the Pharaohs and a painting I had done of Cleopatra. One alcove hinted of the Orient, with a jade statute of Buddha, my Jap sword, tile vases, a black lowboy. In another alcove was a touch of Spain. The porcelain statute of a charging bull, a red lamp, one of my paintings of a Matador, which I labeled, "Fiesta Brava," and a translucent urn of blood red roses. The old south maintained another portion, its ante-bellum home, its dashing cavalier, its torn battle flag of the confederacy keeping eternal vigil. The entire apartment radiated the things I dearly loved, and they in turn radiated my personality. I had never had an opportunity before to decorate a place, to go all out in my selection of material, and my scheme was like my mind, grasping bits of color here and there, seizing upon some utter something from half a world a way

and incorporating it into the pattern of my surroundings, in truth, was the profound pattern of my life.
I wanted a part of the whole world inside these cool walls, a part of the ancient, a part of the ultra modern, so that I could look my fill of each, so that they would reflect my moods and in turn send out reflections of my personality. My abode was as masculine as I, steeped in the menagerie of huge glass animals, guarded by life size statutes of naked gods in bronze, enriched with piles of books, enormous ash trays, decanters and wine glasses. All the material used were solid colors, never patterns nor flowers (I hated patterned matrial) the drapes, the cushions, the rugs, the paneling.

Where once in my earlier youth I had been purged in the glories of the future, space travl – and I still love these things – I now engulfed myself in the ancient, the olden relics I sought coming back from their forgotten tombs to haunt the place. Not that I am morbid. With these ancient wings, statues, shields, coats of arms, I added color, glorious color – emerald, amethyst, purple, jade, a touch of scarlet, melon orange, black – always black – my colors – the colors I would always love about me.

So I built my temple. My battlements was the river whose somber solitude I could drink with my lonely eyes. I built it aloft, above the human world, where none could molest me, like on the wretched islands, where I could dream of Suny – keep myself for him

I was on top of the world, with my work, my new found work, my ambitions, my luxurious abode, my heart courageous over my love for Suny. I was supreme, content for the first time in my life. Freedom was mine. I had no laws, no rules, no set schedule outside my work.

Easter, I went home for a visit, and found him more ardent than when I left. Absence does make the heart grow fonder. He had lost none of his affection for me. In fact, whther it was because I was lonely to see him, I do not know, he seemed fonder of me than he ever had. His green eyes sparkled like wet prisms of glass. He catered to my every whim. Sex lasted longer, on purpose, I imagined – I thrilled in imagining.

Later, in Baton Rouge, I often wondered if Suny, in his deep and personal concern for the pains I had received by the brutal assaults of those marines overseas,

ever imagined for an instant that the pain I experienced with him was equal, if not greater. I will never tell him this. We have made a beautiful vow and I shall keep that vow. Too, pain, in a sense, can be love – as love can be pain. That he gives me pain to reach his joys makes that pain a dormant vision, a less striking element in tha the loves me. To endure is a sacrifice, and a noble sacrifice if you endure for the one you love, for the one who loves you in return. You endure pain because through the pain you are giving something, and only through that pain can you give. Had Suny had me without there being an element to pain, even an essence of pain, I would have felt that I had cheated him. It is like a woman, and is basically the same, who becomes preganant, bears a child and gives it to her lover. The pains she has borne are the pains of love, of adoration, of surviving under the masculine gender? It is her defense, her giving back. So it is with Suny and me. The rougher he becomes with me the more I know I am pleasing him. And, if I was not man enough to deserve him. The more he ravishes my body, hesitating within me, the more I am conscious that I can keep him. Should I rebuke, feign weakness under his sexual assault. I stand a good chance of losing him, of his abandoning me for another.

Should more women in the world realize this today, the more apt they are to keep their husbands. Giving love is receiving love.

Settled at last in th Baton Rouge, with a various group of friends, but most friends with whom I worked, I found additional time on my hands after the sun went down, and started venturing more into the city and adapting its ways. Even the most start crossed lovers must have diversions, or recreation of a sort, and, even though I was bound up heart and body to Suny, I sought solace in speaking with others. To seek (and I fear I have made you misunderstand me by that one word – seek) companionship other than with those whom I worked, others who did not make it a habit to talk constantly shop, who were new. New faces, new voices, new personalities. I was not seeking sex. There was an abundance of that in Suny's arms. And I have never sought sex primarily, this is to say, I never sought sex for the sake of sex. The men who have been in my life, or should

I say males, who have gone to bed with, who have had me, were not first nighters. First, and foremost, I had cultivated a standing friendship with them, a mutual liking, had discovered something about them of absolute admiration, the qualities of a genuine male, before merging into more intimate relations Sex had always come later. It has never been, and it will never be, sex first, then the hopes of a friendship afterwards. I could never indulge in sex with a stranger, however, attractive, how dominating, how captivating. Sex must offer more. The heart and the mind must blend Physical attraction – genuine physical attraction, comes only when the heart has turned on its burning ardour of love. The physical presence alone becomes rampant.

There was a Lounge which set in the very heart of the city that somehow held my interest. I passed it often, glancing into and through its opened doors – doors in the daytime which beckoned invitingly, but I had neglected to pursue it. I had never frequented bars, mainly because I did not drink, and bars and lounges and dancehalls seemed of another world, a place I was . forbidden to enter.

One lonely night, (I had seen every movie in town), I braved its entrance and went in. I occupied a small table next to a column and when the one waitress in the establishment came to my side, out of embarrassment, ordered a beer.

Quietly, I sat, sipping the beer spasmodically, and studied the place. It fascinated me. Its trappings were gorgeously distributed, heightening its somewhat elegance (as if I had known elegance in bars) and dictated my admiration for it as a whole. Its entirety was done in silver and black. Black walls with shimmering silver drapes, cascading from ceiling to floor – that identical shimmering silver seen on Christmas trees and on the flowing gowns of the fairies in the movie, “A Midsummer Nights Dream.” The carpet, wall to wall, was of the same material, probably sprinkled daily with that breathtaking confetti and gave to the continuance of its dark cavern-like appearance, the celestial magnificence of the universe. The thousands upon thousands of tiny winking yes like the stars in the heaven. Against one side was a bar, with a stuffed black leather hand rest and white leather seats. Behind the bar a faint red glow

caught in their fires the tiny stars and reflected back in red. Enormous mirrors lined the black walls between the sparkling drapes, of a blueist cast, and created a thousand identical images with its criss cross reflections. One face in the crowd could be observed hundreds of times by the mirrors hanging opposite each other, observed from every angle. No glance, no gesture, no happy nor depraved look could go unnoticed in this bar, due to the repetitious images strung to eternity on both sides, like a dark ocean without a shore, an endless perspective.

It was small wonder they called this the Looking Glass Lounge. From where I sat I could observe all the occupants in the place, and took note readily that they all had one thing in common, besides their drinking and smoking – they were all men.

Odder still, was their manner of dress. Some of them had on blousy shirts, of a pastoral shade, slashed to their navel and tied in a dainty knot at the fly of their pants, pants which resembled women's pedal pushers more than men's slacks. They were barelegged, or barefoot, some wearing soft soled slippers, heeless, soleless.

I thought – was the Ballet De Monte Carlo in town?

These darkly shadowed figures sat along the small tables down the length of the bar, several huddled frivolously around the juke-box, which sat in one corner at the rear end. Like moths around amber, they pivoted their slender bodies with the cadence of the music, swaying their hips repeatedly, each on putting on a private show of his own.

I watched, out of curiosity surely – but with acid disgust.

These were men – some boys among them – and they were acting like girls!

Taking each one separately, and giving him careful scrutiny, I saw other things about them which appalled me. Their hair was coiffured like women, high on their heads, in spit curls over their foreheads, draping low at the nape of their neck, usually over their ears. Their eyes had that dark painted look of actresses on the stage, painted with exaggeration to deflay the overhead floodlights. They dripped with jewelry – obviously cheap jewelry, for I doubted if there was a buck among them.

Having satisfied my curiosity momentarily, (I would

come back to them later), my eyes roamed to the bar itself and its occupants Here sat a different montage of males – or shall I say men. For they looked like men in every degree, in every latitude of their bodies. Most of them had short hair, two crew cuts among them, looked athletic, and from the low backed leather seats their bodies looked hard, healthy, utterly masculine. One of them was exceptionally handsome. He swiveled on the leather seat once, surveying the place, I imagined, and his eyes crossed mine for a second. They were green, like Suny's, and the dark hair on his head was neatly trimmed, brushed smoothly over his forehead and shone radiantly in the scarlet glow of the bar lamp. He was wearing a short sleeve shirt, snow white, which gave off a bluish tint in the sparkling darkness, tight blue jeans which were bleached from wear, and black Italian shoes and white socks.

He looked about Suny's age, and obviously was a college student. It is difficult to tell in these times. Age is no longer an altruism.

Why the contrasting difference in the men at the bar and the ones hovering, or floating, around the juke-box I could not fathom. I knew little of the abodes and of the characteristics of night life, and was a novice (I was sure) in the midsts of professionalism.

The handsome boy at the bar ordered two beers, then came over to my table. His manner held a certain graciousness I always admired in the male.

"May I join you?" he asked, placing the beer and two glasses on the table, a table trapped in the afterglow of blue lighting which sifted down softly from the ceiling. "I don't know what you drink, so I bought you my brand." And he said again. "May I –."

"Of course," I stammered, a little surprised, yet languidly glad. I wanted company, a new face, and his swarthy manner appealed to me in some way, like Suny appealed to me, or Stanley, or even Luther.

He sat down, somewhat reluctantly now, now that he had gained permission, and shoved one of the beers toward me.

"My name is Erik," he said, thrusting out his hand, which I took quickly, noticing his firm grip, the look of strength in his coiled fingers about mine. he had nice hands, one of the first things I always notice about a

man. You can read so much in the shape of a man's hand, the shortness of the fingers, the blunt ends, the soft tissue of the skin overlaying the working bones, the neat trim of the nails, the way he holds anything, folding over it, or jerking at it. A man's hands are the mirrors of his dexterity.

I told him my name, proudly, noticed his ready smile, and thought to myself how friendly people here are. No one ever need be lonely.

"Sounds like an adventurer," he said, smiling again. Then his smile broke. His eyes, looking up from the top of his eyes, looked like the eyes of a cat watching a mousehole. "You're new here, aren't you," he continued, his words short clipped, abrupt.

I answered that I was. I gave him a short history of my life, my reasons for coming to Baton Rouge.

"You don't look like an artist," he remarked, leaning back in his chair, his thick thigh muscles pronounced by their pressure against the seat. He placed a hand behind his head, resting against the pillar.

"What is an artist supposed to look like?" I asked lazily, the beer beginning to thicken my tongue.

"Oh, like that," he answered, thrusting a thumb toward the back of the lounge where the odd looking boys were grouped around the juke-box. "You loak too tough, like you work outside or something. I figured you came off one of the ships, American ships, not foreign. But I'm tough, and am hearty as they come, and I dabble a little in oils, even try to write—do you write?"

I told him about my science fiction projects. I perked up in interests, glad now that I had come to the Looking Glass, glad to have met someone who did the same things I did, anxious now to know him better.

Absently, I glanced back at the boys around the juke-box.

"Friuts – fairies," he said acidly, spitting with his lips, but not spitting really.

I looked again, a little awed, a little mystified. I think I blushed a little.

"I can understand a masculine homosexual," he went on crudely. "But I will never understand, nor condone, those silly faggots."

I caught something in that word condone.

"A masculine homosexual?" I asked, completely

dumbfounded. I had never heard that term in my life.

"Yeah," he answered loudly, waving a hand over toward the bar, "Men like those sitting over there – like me – not like those giddy queens in th back."

He was readily putting himself in a certain category, putting himself and the other rough looking boys at the bar, and he was, at the same time, cutting a wide gap between them and the ones in the back, as if they were an army, one of them on the defensive, the other on the offensive.

Taking in quickly what he had said, I realized he was assuming that I was of the offensive – like him – which in actuality I was. I could never join forces with those girlish creatures who fluttered about the jukebox, giggling, flinging their muscle-less arms. They called to mind a sissified boy who had gone to Florence high. which none of the other boys liked or had any anything to do with, and of another in the Marines, I remembered, who kept to himself – always by himself. Who never went to the latrines until after dark, who never blended in with the other boys. I can still remember him on the island of Guam. On evenings, just before twilight, he would always go out and sit on this huge stone which protruded out from the hill on which we had set up camp, staring blandly, pensively across the valleys and to the open sea. I though he resembled Pam out of mythology. Early one morning, a Sunday morning I believe, they found him dead in his tent, victim of suicide.

These strange creatures were like him – his counterpart – moving in those evasive shadows and lights, silhouettes momentarily, then delineated in the full flood of a multitude of glowing radiances as they approached the musicbox to play their risqué numbers.

I looked back at this clean cut boy, this good looking boy, this Erik, and I suspicioned he considered me an intricate part of all this, this multiplied strangeness, ths accumulation of men – I suddenly knew – who liked other men, perhaps even loved them, like Luther and I, like Suny. I wondered if he loved someone too, if he shared the same intimate secrets with someone as I shared with Suny. This idea sent intoxication through me. To sit here, in the exposed arena of the world, in the sight of these other men, in sight of this bar woman,

talking and laughing, yet understanding each other wholly. If this sort of thing had gone on openly, in every city, in every country – and it must be going on – Baton Rouge was no exception – then for how long. Years? Years even before I was horn'!

If so, then indeed I had been buried!

All these glittering things had swept past my novice life, leaving me far behind like a hobbling ancient. Only those who had actually made love to me, who had had me, were the only ones of this kind, I thought unerringly. That they had meeting places, secluded bars, was unthinkable!

Surely I was wrong. Or, was I so ignorant of the ways of the world, I had not stopped to pursue the objective.

"Are all the boys in here like this?" I asked him desperately, the desire to find out quickly and by first hand information giving me needed courage.

He lifted an eyebrow.

"Where you been all your life?"

I shrugged.

Of course they are all like that. Why do you think they come in here. Man – this is a gay bar."

"A what?" I asked impatiently, leaning closer to him, the jukebox kicking off some rapid tempo number I was not sure of his last word.

"Gee!" he fizzed, throwing up both hands and rolling his eyes heavenwards. "I thought I had seen them all. You never been in a queer joint before?"

I shook my head, embarrassed, but I was all ears.

"Here – in the Looking Glass, everybody in Baton Rouge comes who is queer. Male homosexuals, faggots, queens, nellies, aunties, even the bull dikes, the lesbians sometimes, and once in a while, hustlers, though Blanche – Blanche owns the place, doesn't want them in here – the hustlers I mean, not the faggots – she loves those little faggots." He twisted his body indication. "She thinks – and get this – she thinks hustlers give the place a bad name. Ha!"

I laughed back, though his montage of names, and his name calling was foreign to me. Yet, I saw in this Erik, a valuable ally. I liked him from the first, and was readily convinced that he knew this world thoroughly into which I had entered, and would be able to help

me in the future. There was that stableness about him an honesty on which you could depend. He would be my interpreter.

He looked at me for a tense moment, studying me, I was certain. Yet, there was thoughtfulness in his animal alert eyes, and with that thoughtfulness, a much needed understanding.

"I know you're not a faggot," he said sharply, pointing a finger at me. "You could be a hustler – you're that tough looking – but you're not. I like you. You're my kind of boy. Futhermore, you're honest, I can tell. There's not put on about you. You say what you mean and mean what yo usay. I like that. And believe me, after listening to these screaming faggots (he turned and glanced at them hatefully then back again to me) you can appreciate decency and honesty. You don't get much of that here."

I said thanks, in that touch of mannerism I could master so well. I thought, especially when I wanted to be kind, thinking how wonderful it was to be praised once again after my long absence from Suny. He was taking out the lonely places and was filling those places with knowledge and understanding, and I was genuinely grateful.

"What do you like to do?" he asked, and the sound of his voice appeared that he was sincerely interested.

"Oh, paint, write, go horseback riding, swim, read – mostly simple things though, nothing elaborate. I never went in for polished things, nightclubs, parties,.the finer things, I suppose."

"You're my kind," he whispered, raising his glass and indicating that I toast his confession. I clicked my glass with his. Then he went on. "I drink not to the robed, the jeweled, who ride with the charioteers. I drink to the poor, the kind, the rejected, who are hemmed in my the spears. I drink not to silver, to glitter and to gold. I drink to those who have suffered from the heat and the rain and the cold. And of these my songs shall be fashioned and my tales be told."

"Bravo!" I said, when he had finished, bringing down my glass which had remained tipped with his for the duration of the toast.

"Thought you'd like that," he smiled. "Proof you're my kind. I can look at the books a man reads and can

tell what kind of a man he is. I can even tell by the way he sets a horse. It's funny how you can tell. Like in here. I can pick everyone of them out just by looking at them. Types. But the hardest to tell is the masculine homosexual, did you know that? Like you, I could not tell right off if you were a masculine homosexual or not, or a homosexual at all – damn I hate that word homosexual – that is, until I talked to you. Don't get me wrong. I'm no smart ass. I just can tell, that's all."

"I'm sure you can," I praised, contented to sit back, sip my beer, and listen to him talk about this new world into which I was becoming a part.

He twisted his head askew, drinking in my compliments.

"I been around, lived for four years with a guy once. We had an apartment in New York, next to Greta Carbo, believe it or not – the movie actress – I mean (and he underscored that word mean) – the retired movie actress. He was rich, but who cares, it didn't matter to me. He could have been as destitute as any winehead on Skid Row and I would have still liked him. Loved him, let me say instead, for that's what it was. Four years!"

His eyes suddenly dulled to apathy, their sparkling glow gone, and his voice trailed off, drowsy with its nostalgic aftermath.

"If – If only I could find someone else in this rotten world half the man he was, I would live with for the rest of my life."

I caught the tinge of remorse, of bitterness, of something of regret in his voice, and my sympathy went out to him. I had known his same kind of loneliness, his kind of not being wanted, and a part of me seeped into him, haunting still his sadness which was sadder to me because of it.

Not since my trip to Baton Rouge had I met someone quite so interesting, and I wanted him to unfurl his life's history before me, to tell me everything about himself. His sadness had tapped my own loneliness, and we seemed bound somehow in a way that made me comfortable inside.

"What is wrong?" I asked. "You are young and well built. Surely you can find –."

"Hell," he gaped, interrupting. "In this town. Not that

I'm kicking it. I love Baton Rouge. But – but everything seems so misplaced somehow. Everyone is – well – so disinterested. They are friendly enough on the surface, but, they seem afraid to surrender themselves, or to involve themselves. Afraid of being found out! Except those faggots, and who wants them! They get all interested at first – all excited, making plans, then they start making silly excuses. Hell, man, maybe it's me. Maybe I'm the one that's running. I suppose I expect too much – thinking back to Bob in New York – he spoiled me for everyone else."

My mind flashed hack to Norman. He had spoiled me too, and I wondered if Erik and been spoiled as I, ruthlessly, and sought only ruthlessness in all the others he had met and had known.

"I know," I whispered, before I thought. "I know what you mean. Once long ago —", then I caught myself, picked up my beer hurriedly and drank deftly, as if to consume the contents in the glass.

Too rough to talk about —", he finished for me, then smiled a wry smile. "It's a hell of a world when what you want is so difficult to find. There all around me, yet, I wouldn't have any of them. You know why? There is no substitute for what you really want."

We ebbed to silence then, as the music on the jukebox picked up its cue, and we sat and listened, watched disinterested as several of these feminine boys came toward us, their heads held purposely high, their glittering eyes passing over us, beyond us, as if they were seeing something in another world, another time, another dimension. When they reached us, they pivoted, their arms like the tentacles of an octopus, their asses jerking from side to side as if on torsion axles, their constant jabbering as foreign to me as if they were speaking to each other in another language. They were wearing extremely short shorts, and ballet shoes, or loafers, and their slender shapeless legs looked as if they had been shaved.

"Hey, thar, Erik," one of them cooed, his voice stretching out every word. "Whar you'all been, to Nuw Awlens – takin' up with sum Queen, ah bet. Whut yo tryin' to du, brake my po country gurl's hart?"

"Beat it!" Erik spat, giving them the thumb. His eyes dropping side-long glances at me." They know my name,

like everybody knows everybody's elses name that comes in here – but, that's all they know about me."

"It's your life," I said, a bit stung by their assumed attentions on him. Yet I did not know why I felt stung. I had only seen him this once, and most probably would never see him again.

"You don't believe me?" he came back tartly.

"Yes – I believe you," I assured, noticing happily that he was concerned about my impression of him. "Why should you care?" I added flippantly.

"I do care," he said, with directness of speech and tone. "I do. I like you. I'm a man see, a real he man and just because I like men doesn't make me less of a man. But," and he stammered. "As I say – I – I like you, and I want to see you again. I mean that."

His soft eyes took on a tenderness which melted something within me, and I kept my eyes on his, telegraphing things to which I was not always master. His face was close to mine and I could distinguish the sun tanned richness of his skin, the clean, sun tipped radiance of his hair, even though he was directly under one of the soft blue ceiling lights which, as if by magic, transformed him into something of the supernatural.

Then I smiled. I will never know why. He took it for mockery, for ridicule. The spell had been broken.

"Damn!" he cried, striking the table with his fist so hard the glasses rattled. His eyes were naked with regret. "I got to blow. See you around." He rose from his chair, and stood over me for a moment. He sshook my hand. "Nice talking to you, eh – Ret – eh – can I just call you star." He touched my tattoo with a forefinger. "I'm so bad on names."

I assured him that he could, and on that moment my new name was born. It would become my name – my name only – in this bar, this Looking Glass Lounge – which I would come to frequent often, drawn here somehow, like a fly is drawn into the sparkling sayannah of a spider's irradescent web, drawn by something beyond my principal, beyond my moral caring, drawn to se Erik, I suppose, to hear him talk, to find out more about him, to see his fine body playing under the folds of his bleached jeans, his cool summer shirts, his suntanned muscular legs whenever he wore black shorts and, through his interpretations, learn of that under-

world of anarchy, that lawless band of refugees from loneliness.

I saw Erik often during the months that followed. Usually in this bar, with no set dates, no scheduled time for meeting, yet always running into him, as if he was waiting for me, or I for him – a silent understanding between us. And during this time, I learned much about this dark shadowy world in which I had become a member. Terms seeped into my brain, and locked into my memory, terms, catch to expressions, titles, almost an entirely new language. Some of them I loathed. Others I merely tolerated. To those I hated, I adapted my own names, my own terms.

Like Erik, I abhored the term homosexual, and that word GAY. The homosexual phrase was too scientific, too medical sounding, and the word Gay was too feminine – utterly too feminine to fit properly the masculine homosexual which dominated, and made up my private world.

I wanted to call the gays, the faggots, the gueens, the nellies – those of exaggerated feminity – these I wanted to call mannequin. I have always loved to gaze at those immobile figures in shop windows, with their sparkling hair, their glass-like eyes, their lusty eyelashes (always too long) the graceful hands, legs, rigid postures, and intensified by the directness of light upon them which made them all the more artificial – fairey like. I sam something about them which was akin somehow to those feminine queers, alive, yet not alive, more doll like than human, more life like than statues – yet glittering with that artificial glow which holds in its realm a fascination unequalled.

And I wanted to call the masculine homosexual TOROS, for, to me, this is the most masculine word in the human language today. What its sound – its very look – even in print – conjures! The scarlet sails of bright satin at high noon, a male figure in silk, so tight to the skin it looks wet, graceful thighs, graceful form, like a Spanish dancer, the wild thrust of blunt horns, which is symbolic of manhood, the gory, the blood, of sex itself, the conjuring up of sweat, of dripping muscles, of black hair and fury, of slobber and sand, of silver blades slicing the hot air, of human yells, applause, of sand, red roses, the marriage of male with male – male animal with

man – male against nature – and of the smells! Fresh blood, warm from the kills, the smell of sweat against animal and man, the smell of hot Sunday afternoons, the smelt of rustling silk, old perfume, crushed roses, wet sand, male bodies – male sex!

So, henceforth, I shall refer to the masculine homosexual – and of those extreme masculine homosexuals especially – like Norman, Luther, Stanly, Cisco, Erik, Suny, I shall refer to these as Toro's, so that from my mind to the world, I hope, this therm will eventually stick and find its place among those unappropriate terms which will fade out completely and become forgotten.

Erik came to my apartment often or, to my Asgardh, he called it – the abode of the Gods!

I enjoyed having him under foot, as he would sit for hours reading, watching T.V., playing his favorite records which he brought over and left, using my typewriter to turn out short novelettes, themes usually on hunting, fishing, or on some form of sport. He loved the out of doors, the return to nature, anything utterly masculine and which most athletic men love. He was never "company" so to speak, did not have to be entertained, and added his own little touch to the apartment whenever he was in a creative mood. He usually went about the apartment naked, with only oriental sandals on, or jockey shorts, and the glory of his body had its educational comforts for me. Like Suny, his body was one of natures best exaples of true art, and his male beauty enhanced the place, put sugar in the pie.

Though we slept in the same bed, usually on those hot summer nights on the black fur spread which covered it, and always both of us naked, he never touched me, nor attempted any attitude of sex. Ocassionaly, during the late hours his naked body, perhaps from the coolness of the breezes which swept from the river, he would ease up against me, thrusting an arm beneath my neck, his other one around my chest, his thigh sometimes over my loins, and awake, I would lie listening to his contented breathing, basking in the balm of his body near mine, relishing the warm comfort, his clean, wholesome friendship, the pure beauty which was ours.

His complexion was as smooth, as radiant as a technicolor suntan lotion ad, and one which any woman would have been envious, but could not have worn without self

consciousness. And the hair on his body was tipped with gold, laying sparsely over his extremely heavy thighs on his chest and down to his crotch. When gathered up, his jockey shorts protruded in a gorgeous mould of headed up rapture. He could never wear tight trunks in swimming for this reason. His masculinity was too obvious.

That he liked me was apparent, though we never discussed our relationship, nor did we display physical symbols so common in that lavender world – even among Toro's. Only one time, I remember, did he let his affection rise to the surface and out into the open, and let his reserve slip out of proportion.

I had given him a sterling silver identification bracelet for his birthday and, sitting on the edge of the bed looking at it, he glanced momentarily at a picture of Suny which I always kept on the bed table.

"What do you give him on his birthday?" he had asked lowly, his voice hardly above a whisper.

"Love and kisses," I had answered casually, laughing a little. He turned abruptly and stared at me, his blue eyes, so emerald in the darkness, turning like that of the sky on a clear day, their long lashed rims startlingly wide – like that of a surprised child.

"So you love him," he muttered, underscoring that one word him, magnetizing it, making it resound again and again, like a series of echoes about the bedroom.

"Yes, Erik, I do love him," I answered, thinking just how much I did love him, realizing how impossible it was to convey that love to anyone else.

"Then – you can't ever love me?" he questioned, his voice shakey, like a man facing the gallows. His eyes were suddenly sad, and his full lips looked dry and swollen, his face flushed.

"It is impossible to love two people at the same time," I said, trying to mend the apathy of his obvious despair.

He lay back on the bed.

I went into the kitchen to make coffee, and when I returned with two red cups on a sparkling black Japanese tray, he had his hand lying across his lips, kissing the bracelet, and he was crying.

Afterwards, there was a tinge of sadness to our relationship, yet he came more often, and late at night he snuggled up to me a little closer than before. I would

I had learned long ago to identify with love. I had hurt him, he, who had not deserved to be heart, had made him even more lonely in his lost loneliness.

I hated to hear anyone cry, especially a man, for when a man cries he unleashes something within himself. something profound, like sex, of which he cannot master. That he betrays his manhood, as so many people think, is not so. The more male a man, the more tender his nature. It is the effeminate natures that are cold and hard.

I knew Erik was tender, knew there was a lot of him that was heart, that he had an enormous capacity for loving, and at times, I must confess, I wanted that love. But I was bound to Suny with a vow I could not break

I gave Erik a part of my heart though on those long dark summer nights when he lay close to me, his warm naked body, at times with his head on my chest, pulsating bravely to keep his distance. There were times too, when I wanted to turn over and put my own arms around him, to kiss him, to fondle him, but I would not – I dared not!

Sometimes Toro's are content without touching, a platonic love, taking bits of satisfaction from a meeting with the fingers, brushing against one another during work and at play, lying close in the bed at night, for the power is still there between them, that imprisoned power that, when unleashed, springs into a fury, then nothing, however great, can pull them apart. It is in this knowledge – as with Erik and me – knowing that we have these potentials, which binds us like invisible cords. It is this gift of knowledge that make us inseperable. We are drawn to each other by a force as powerful as the force which made the planets, perhaps the same force, and like the planets hurling around their sun, veering but forever desperate to plunge back into it, we were desperate to collide our bodies with the burning flames of sex, to break the bladder of our reserves. Yet, we kept our sanctum. He, with his courage – that silent courage which sometimes is mistaken for priden, and me with my vow with Suny.

We were still enriched with youth, the youth of our good looks, our physical good health, and our attitudes. And youth is hard.

It is not true that temptation is worse for young men. It is the middle aged men, wistful with the loss of fulfilment, prone to melancholy reverential of youth, glad of any music to sing them out of rememberance of the gathering silence – it is they, who find it hard to say no.

But Erik, like Suny, but without the art of sex, healed my old wound inflicted on me in the Pacific Islands. He helped to bring back my old haughtiness, my belief in myself, my pride of body and manhood, a part of my soul, which I had lost on Guadalcanal. His love for me, and I knew he loved me, gave me numerous rewards. And love should not ask for rewards. That someone loves you at all is enough to expect.

The goodness, the simpleness of his heart, flowed from him and into me and made me a richer, better person through that flowing – that constant stream of pure gold that was his secret love.

But I was to be taken back to Guadalcanal and that gory episode despite Erik's great human healing, despite that he had taught me that warm love can exist without sex, without masculine brutality.

It was on Saturday night and Erik had gone to Longwood to visit his father, one of those typical Saturday nights in Baton Rouge when the town was occupying their time on beaches, on yachts, fishing or sporting in the open, in the hot out of doors. The lounges, what few they were, with the exception of those across the river at Port Allen, were practically empty, I had seen no movie on the marque which showed even the slightest promise of entertainment, it was too hot to remain in the apartment and watch T.V., I was bored momentarily with art and writing, so I walked up and down Third Avenue slowly, looking into shop windows, harboring over clothes I would buy next, suffering from an acute illness of loneliness over Erik's absence. I really missed him, and was attempting to tell myself, for the hundredth time that it was Suny I missed instead, but on the hundredth time it didn't work. I missed Erik, his body near mine at night, our long endless conversations, his warm presence lighting up the apartment. He had been gone two weeks now, and the thump in my heart was beginning to sound like a drum.

Overhead, the sky was dark. It is always dark above

the lights of a city. But darker tonight because of a great covey of black clouds gathering in from the river, the forerunner of a rainstorm which, in this area, would come in a moment, pouring down onto the city, washing debris to the very capacity of its gutters.

Fate was laying its grimy pattern. My life of violence always came in the wake of a storm. Ahead, though I did not know it, disaster waited for me.

I crossed a street. Florida, I believe, and was about to pause before the front of a men's hat shop (though I never wore a hat except when horseback riding) when two marines came down the street in my direction.

At the sight of those uniforms my heart skipped a beat, as sharp memory tore at me, proud memories, horrible memories, of war, of banners, of parades, of inspections, of guns, of skirmishes, of blood, of death.

Those green uniforms with their golden buttons, the braid, the shiny leather, the dashing barracks caps, the stalwart bodies within them – all, carried me back, back through doors I had closed forever.

When they came abreast of me I could not take my eyes off them, proud, momentarily, that I had been a part of them, a member of that endless lines of green clad heroic men, that savage rampart between war and peace. I did not know that my eyes proved another impression.

When I passed them I overhead one of them say to the other, "these southern boys sure have love in their eyes – all of them," my admiration vanished like mist before sunshine.

Then, either through the gathering tide of loneliness over Erik, the pent up strain, the tension that grows and builds up with my kind, my rage broke.

Turning abruptly into an alley between the hat shop and a jewelry store, with its overhead sign flapping like the great dark wings of a bird, I lay my head against the filthy wall and cried like a child.

It all came trooping back. Guadalcanal! Rape! Merciless pain – ever – ever—burning pain!

And they still had the power to insult me, to mock me, had the dudacity to call me a names?

Would they never be through with me? Would they never tire of my body, taring me forever through the savage medium of my rememberance? Would they never

tarnish me enough, throw me aside so that I could rest, could crawl to a safe place to bleed, to regain my breath? God! What had I done that life must punish me again and again?

Was there something about my own body, the way I looked to them, the way my eyes shone, the way I acted, walked, talked, that stirred lust within them? That stirred them also with hatred?

I sniffed, wiping away my tears, trying to think, to pull myself together. Several people walked by, turned, saw me, paused for a second, then went on. Had I lay there bleeding, it would have been the same. No one cared, the world is so callous to human pain. Yet, they bruise their knees in their pious cry to their flimsy, invisible God, soft as feathers in the public eye, hard as granite in privacy.

Overwrought, the reprieve of my loneliness, the marine's insults, this precious bane of agony, altered my continuence momentarily, and I saw myself in a different light. Perhaps, the narcissus urge in me was putting my face to the mirror for the first time, and I was truly seeing myself.

Was it I who had raped the Marines? My glances, my body, seductive perhaps, my walk, was it these physical symbols about me, things I could not see myself, that drew them, that cast them into the roles of seducer, of rapists? I must know.

As if drawn by invisible wires, I retraced my steps, drawn back to the two marines who had so ruthlessly conjured up my past, drawn as if my some unredeemable magic, beckoned on like birds that must know what is on the other side of the mountain.

I found them in the corner drugstore at the magazine section. They were leafing through a booklet of half nude females. I stared at them, my mind overflowing with questions for which I must know the answers.

One of them, sensing my nearness – perhaps keyed to my stare – turned and eyed me coldly for a moment.

"What you gaping at shorty?" he said snappish, chopping his words. "Never seen a gyrine before?"

"I use to be one," I came back tartly, too tartly. His eyes snapped.

"Get a load of him," he said, speaking to the other marine.

"What branch where you in?" he asked drowsly, letting out his words a little slower now. "The marinettes?"

Though I flinched at that last word, I told him my division, my campaigns, even mentioned my two citations.

"You hear that?" he smiled sarcastically, to the other one who seemed quieter, more congenial, less cocky than the one who did the talking. "This runt is a hero, a midget hero, a punk hero!"

"Kock it off," the quiet one said, his voice purposely low.

"Let's buy this hero a drink," the cocky one continued, ignoring the other. "All heroes need a drink, to wash down some of their bravery."

"I don't want a drink," I said, refusing point blank.

He robbed his crotch.

"But I bet I know what you do want – eh, shorty?"

His laugh was like the laugh of the devil.

The other one nudged him in the ribs.

"Let's blow. We don't want to start any trouble."

"No trouble," the other one said, smacking his lips hatefully. "I just want to buy this hero a drink, that's all. All kidding aside," he whispered invitingly, his attitude swiftly changing. "I am Rhett Butler and this is Ashley Wilkes. May we have the honor of buying you a drink – mint julip, Miss – Miss Ohara."

He bowed gracefully from the waist, and made a wide sweep of the air with his barracks cap. He aped the southern brogue.

"It's not every day that a soldier gets to escort such a beautiful lady. Will you take my arm, Scarlett."

He thrust out his arm for me to hold.

I could not help but laugh.

They both smiled back, losing something of their hostility.

They took me to, of all places, the Looking Glass Lounge.

They bought the drinks, in fact, may drinks. The cocky one, who called himself Rhett, came on big. He catered to my every whim, asking me hundreds of questions about my hitch in the marines and applauded me vehemously. The butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, and he complimented me numerous times, actually, as I will know later, acting a burlesqued performance of his

own concoction, in his efforts to get at me with this clever weapon of praise. The one he called Ashley get quietly sipping his drink, his cigarette making lazy ladders to the b1ue-lit ceiling, as if those pale luminous lights drew the smoke into its enchanting confines.

Through the main entrance, from the street up three wide tiled steps, floated a group of mannequins, their constant chatter, as they invaded the lounge, like a covey of parakeets, their slender bodies (or figures) attired in satin shorts and blousy silken shirts, long of sleeve and fitting tightly about their wrists so that they would ballon out whenever they moved, which they did, with every parts of their bodies, and too often.

"Oh, look!" one of them cried in a girlish shreak, as they glided past our table. "Star is cruising the whole marine corps – my, my – will she be sore in the morning."

"Fairies." The marine called Rhett said with a silky tongue, after the mannequins had passed and were seated at a near by table "Their dusty wings make me sneeze!" And he went Ca – choo!

The other marine laughed, shaking out of his doldrums. "Remember those two fairies we met in L.A., the one who said h was a movie star?"

Rhett shook his head.

"Oh, you know, Hank, the one with the silver hair and carried a cigarette holder a mile long, who kept saying . . . the other day on the set –."

"Yeah," Hank laughed, slapping his thigh. "What a ball!" He turned to me, laying a hand on my naker arm. "Paul and I had them just like they were women – better'n girls, eh, Paul?"

Paul blushed, his face crimson in the shroud of blue light.

"Quit you're lying," he said, defending himself. "You know that's not so, though we did go to their room."

His voice trailed off, then then died in the clamour of jukebox music.

"Well, I'm not ashamed to say it," Hank uttered, smiling a little, his head lowered. Then he winked. I was too dumb to read the message behind that wink, to be other than beguiled by these two marines who were part of my past glory, my agony, and who were, by their talk of having sex with men, were convincing me that

the marines could be other than brutal savages – merciless.

Had I known that all this talk was but a ply, and I the central figure in the drama, I would have still carried the saga out of its tragic ending, I believe. I was intoxicated in the enlightenment of my own character, my instinctive motives, and was relying on these two marines, as my peers, to convince me I was wrong about myself.

The Looking Glass Lounge was full by now, with its army of Toro's lounging around the bar, with its numerous mannequins camped out at the tables at the far end of the room, and that no man's land in between.

You could locate and pick oup any of the gods of the old world at the rail, which I called Mounty Olympus, Mars, Zeus, Apollo, Paris, Eros (there were many of these – God of Love) Mercury, perhaps a number of Alexander the Greats, many hung like his stallion Bucephallus. And near the jukeboxes were the Goddesses, the heroines: Diana, Approdite, Venus, Helen of Troy, (or many, who thought they were Helen of Troy's) Medusa, Cleopatra even, with her two lover son each side of her, bending low, as if kissing her breasts, and Electra's (many Electra's) with rigid heads held disdainfully high, surveying the multitudes, the poison of asps on their tongue, the look of sex in their wanton eyes.

There was one in particularlly, which held my momentary interest. He, (she) was seated on a smaller bar which rose from the opposite side of the lounge, and containing a massive aquarium filled with beautiful fish, red lamps which glowed radiantly, and mirrors – mirrors!

Her hair was snow white, as was her lips – luminous, like the phosphorescent in a dark woods, and it was in a balloon shape above her eyes which stared hauntingly from her high perch. Like an imagined Queen scrutinizeing her imagined populace, she sat, swinging one bare leg which lay over the other, her pink ballet shoes making a glittering trail in the star winking darkness. A cigarette was between her jeweled fingers, and she kept it poised in the air, her elbow on her knee, the blue some mushroomed around her like a halo, lending her the appearance of an imaginary being, as if, afterwards, you wondered if she really existed at all.

This boy, who was so small, even smaller than me, was so beautiful, so intensely beautiful, her could have made a strikingly beautiful woman. So beautiful, that any real woman would have looked on in malicious envy. About that face, that beautiful, sad face, which still haunts me, there was the tragic symbol of all his kind, as if she had been carved and sat there as a reminder to the others of their creed. Just as the carvings of Jesus in churches, as a reminder of Christianity.

Turning my attention back to Hank and Paul, I noticed, even under the translucent glow of the lights, their faces had taken on a pallow hue, almost waxy, though I did know it, the forerunner of drunkness.

We talked spasmodically, them asking unimportant questions, and me asking unimportant questions about them, where they were stationed, how long they had been in the service, had they been overseas, etc., yet noticing that Hank sat closed, his hand frequently, too frequently, resting on my arm, on my hand, his thigh pressing against mine.

"Let's go to you apartment," he said drowsily, giving me a sly wink. "To see your paintings."

I told him I thought not, using the excuse that it was getting late, cautioning them, as if interested, that they probably had to report back to their base, or home, or somewhere, making it sound essential, imperative. I suppose the tone of my voice gave away my uneasiness. Yet, I was curious to know what they wanted to do, their desires, impelling me to lower bars which should never be lowered.

"Ah, please," Hank kept insisting, his thigh contenuously nudging mine. "I'm not going to do – eh – anything to you."

"I have one motto, I said bravely, remembering the anecdote of my great aunt. "Eat and drink in company, but sleep alone."

"Now who said anything about sleeping with you," Hank laughed, punching me in the ribs playfully, bringing up sharply Cisco and the was he had teased, flirted. "I just want to sit in a house for awhile, to see some furniture, like someone normal for a change. Its been so damned long since I've seen a rug on a floor, or a kitchen, things like that."

His voice tore its way into my heart, for I, too, on

returning from the war, relished the feel of household things, soft carpets, clean linen, fluffly towels, tonics, the smell of bacon and coffee in the early morning.

What could be the harm?

We went to my apartment.

Hank tried to hug me all the way, putting his arm around my waist, laughing softly, pinching me on the ass.

The minute the lock was turned I knew I had made a mistake.

His attitude swiftly changed back to when I first encountered him in the drugstore. Though now, more malicious, instead of merely cocky.

He reached out and slapped me so hard across the face I reeled back, stunned. He pushed me back on the bed, tore off my clothes, while Paul watched him.

Utterly frightened, so frightened I was almost paralyzed, I tried to get up, to wrest myself from his hard, steel like grasp. He struck me on the lower jaw. I fell back faintly. Darkness overwhelmed me, and out of that darkness I could hear his voice – dragging – darting at me – from far, far off – then closer – very close.

"You queer runt, trying to fool us, eh, saying you were in the marines. The marines wouldn't have you – not you a fruit – we'll teach you. We'll give you a working over you won't forget – won't me Paul."

Out of that darkness, my face paining, my eyes opening and closing, I could see them in the soft fusion of the bedlamps. They were pulling off their clothes, they were standing over me – naked – naked – their in the darkness.

I tried to rise. I fell back limply. My head spun. Darkness again. Darkness – darkness – pain – pain! "Have mercy – mercy – please!" I cried, cried again and again.

I felt a hard jolt on my face, above my eye. Some thing was running down my eye, something warm – hot. I brought my hand to my eye. Blood!

Hard hands out of the cruel darkness were lifting my body, turning me over. A great weight lay on me, crushing me. A splinter of pain shot through me. I screamed. Something was pounding me on the back of the head, hard. hard, cutting, bruising.

Darkness again!

Pain – more pain!

Darker darkness – black darkness!

Tiny stars danced before my eyes. My head reeled.

My body was aflame. Every crevice burned with pain, agony – agony! The squeaking of the mattress was like a clamour in my ears. I could smell the rancidity of the male.

Then, all was silent.

The pain was gone. My legs felt paralyzed. I opened my eyes. Through the film of blood I could see them, a little apart from me now, the room suddently a flutter with the putting on of their clothes, snatching a garment here, there, wehre they had flung them in their abandoned passion.

I tried to move, to get up. I fell off the bed, grabbed for the spread, the weight of my body pulling me with it. I managed to sit up, I n a head of the tangled fur spread, my arms and my head resting on the bed.

They ignored me. Silent, doning themselves quickly, to leave, to vanish, now that they were through with me. Morosely, I hated the marines, hated it with a rebellious passion, when once I had loved it.

The door banged open.

I opened my eyes.

It was Erik.

He sat his suitcase down quickly on the threshold. His bright eyes in the bedroom glow, when he saw me, my face, the blood, were like the eyes I had seen on the marines oversas when they faced a Jack with a bayonet.

"What the hell –" he bellowed. He was in a rampage.

"This punk – this punk (his voice was shaking) said he was in the marines," Hank stammered. "So – so we roughed him up a bit."

"Fine roughing," Erik spat, moving closer. His fists were clinched. He struck, like lightening, Hank directly in the mouth. "We'll just have a ball." His fists pounded him in the mid-section, doubling him over. He kicked him out the door, pushed him to the head of the stairs, then shoved him down the stairs. There was a series of bumps and hollow intonations that died in the night.

Erik came bac to the door. His eyes were cold and hard on Paul.

"You wanta go quietly, or like the other guy?"

Paul moved toward the door, reaching once to retrieve

his black belt. “I had no part in this,” he cried, his voice trembling. “I – I just come along – for the ride.”

Erick kicked him.

“Well – just ride outta here, will you!” Then he grabbed him back of the collar. “Wait a minute, Mac, wanta show you something.”

The marine paused nervously on the threshold.

Erik jerked the war albumn from a rack, the one Suny and my mother had fixed, and thrust it into his hands.

“Take a quick look at this! See if this convinces you that he was in the marines.”

Paul thumbed rapidly through the book, halting but momentarily here and there, his eyes diverting, rolling in bewilderment.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered brokenly, throwing the book on the bed. Then he was gone, the clatter of his heels on the tile like a hobbling relic out of hell.

“My baby,” Erik whispered, lifting me back upon the bed. “You’re a sight”

He went to the bathroom and, wetting a towel, came back and washed my face. When he was finished, he stood and looked down at me for a moment, his face sad, defiant in the light. Then he bent and kissed me.

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CHAPTER 12

During my convelascence Erik was beside me constantly. He did the cooking, cleaned the apartment, bathed me, never left my bedside once. My face swelled almost round. My eyes were blackened, and were so puffed I could hardly see out of them. My back, shoulders and chest were purple. My head ached constantly. I had spells of delirium. I imagined that I was on Guadalcanal again, fighting, once again in the war, patrols along the Lunga river, beating the brush for Japs. I talked in my sleep. There were times when I lay unconscious of my surroundings, wondering who was the stranger who bent over me, lifting my head for food, bathing me. I talked out of my head. Once, I remember, crying heartbrokenly, and telling him what had happened to me on the island. Thankfully, he was always near – so very near. His presence eased my throbbing head, my eyes, my whole body. At night, on awakening, he would be next to me, his hand in mine, his body against mine. Delirious, I could head wild noises outside the window, could see great flashes of light, could hear crashing and sounds like the popping of rifle fire. I though I was in the war again. Yet, I knew that I was not. I asked Erik where the sounds were coming from.

"It's a storm, baby," he whispered solemnly. "Hurricane Hilda."

When at last, I was up and about the apartment I was morose, sad, bewildered. The swelling had gone out of my face, but my eyes around and about them were still discolored, and bloodshot. The soreness was gone from my back and shoulders. I was being healed, thanks to Erik and his constant vigil, but the wounds in my heart, my sould, could never be healed. Even Erik, with his divine kindness, his loyalty, could not mend those shattered agonies.

At night, I had nightmares, frightful nightmares, and I believed again and again that terrible ordeal. The following mornings, I would be lifeless, weary, completely drained of all energy. I remained dazed and sick. My head continued to ache. I had spells of nausea. Erik dogged my every step, catering, administering, petting me a little, loving me greatly, though silently. I refused to talk. My mind was adrift. I let myself go.

For hours, I would sit on the gallery in the warm sun staring blanky at the ships in the harbor, at the old negro down by the ferry landing, in his long white robe, cap, and Bible, lifting his huge white cross upwards to hs nonexisting God. I brooded. I kept myself in some kind of hemmed in solitude. At times, I cried. Erik would come out, sit back of me, put his arms around me, his head buried in the arch of my back.

"If you would only come across," he would say, in a pleading way. "Get it off your chest."

He was the only salvation in a world gone mad. His eyes always followed me, imploring, saddening. I would have to look away. His staring did strange, terrific things to me, things for which I had no words, wakening vitality in my sick body, my sick mind, flattering, commandng, stirring a new curiosity, robbing me of breath.

Ours was the fervor of mind for mind, a clasp ore frantic than that of the arms, a continuous psychic state more passionate than the great moments of physical passion. I wanted to be alone, to think, to pul myself out of my doldrums, but I still could not endure him out of my sight. Actually, I think, I was afraid to be alone – afraid of my the darkness – afraid my delirium would come back, my nightmares from which there was no escape. Even when he went after groceries, I paced the floor until he returned, keeping the door locked, remaining at the window until I could see him down the street on his way back.

When my face completely healed I went home, hoping that would help, hoping that Suny would brighten my sipirt. But even thesre things seemed alient, strange Their interests were no longer my interests. Suny talked constantly of college, his athletic achievements, of which I was duly proud, but they were not things of my world. I missed Erik. Within a month, I returned. He was waiting for me.

He was standing at the top of the stairs when I returned, the sunlight streaming in through the apartment windows with a faint blue radiance, illuminating his fine body like that of a saint. He put his arms around me when I came slowly up to him, my suitcase as heavy as my heart, as wearisome to carry as my tired, decadent body.

We went to New Orleans for the week-end then back,

then to Thunderbird beach for two weeks, soaking up sun, eating, relaxing.

Nothing worked.

I threw myself into a religious apathy. I began to paint pictures of Christ, the Crucifixation, the Last Supper, His accent to heaven. Erik kept constant vigil. Silently, like a mighty heart, he sat back of me, watching – perhaps waiting – waiting for my change, for me to return to my old self, which I can never do.

One of the churches in Batton Rouge was setting aside eighteen thousand dollars for murals for its walls. Always before, they had sent for an artist out of Italy, but this time they wanted to give the money to a local man, preferrably a souhern artist. They looked at my religious paintaings. They liked them immensely. I was commissioned to do the work.

With Erik helping me, mixing paint, arranging scaffolding, bringing lunches, I worked almost around the clock. My silence, my meditations, my mood, drove me like a Titan. I became obsessed. My mind was in that trackless desert, as I painted that tragic face, those sharp thorns, the blood on the checks, the lips, into the beard, the thin, neat gash in His wonderful side. Laboring, and laboring earnestly, I tried to call back my faith, tried to reach Him with my painting, each stroke of my brush a prayer, each selection of color a search for some kind of salvation.

I finished the work, at long last, thankfully, though morosely. The murals in the church took me no higher to heaven than the top of the scaffolding. I decided to do one more painting of Christ. I painted Him seated. His face I painted looking forward. I used Erik's eyes, his hands, his fee. I used a thousand other faces for the face of Christ, those I had loved, those I had hated – a little.

While I pained I refused to eat anything but bread, milk, butter and wine. I wanted to suffer more. To feel more pain. I wanted the thorns in my own hair, His blood running down my own face, wanted my hands pierced, wanted to hang on that cross. I read DOCTOR AT CALVARY over a hundred times in pursuit of agony, to feel what He had felt. I failed. The heavens remained silent. I could get no answer.

Now I know that Jesus is not God. He was only a poor hungry heart, haunted and hunted to His death.

The God that abandoned me on Guadalcanal, and later returned to strike in the form of the two boot marines, is a God I shall never forgive. Those cruel incidents have altered my whole life. My life of violence.

So what is to be my future?

If that violence continues, will they someday find me lying in some dark alley, my throat slit, or strangled, or beaten to death?

I wonder. I am frightened. There is not a moment that I live that I am not stealthy frightened. If Erik and Suny do not continue to help me, if I lose them, then I am lost. They are the only shields that stand between me and total destruction.

For now, now in this unrest, unrest all over the world, Baton Rouge and other cities over America like it are being invaded – invaded by an army which has about it the tattered counterpart to defeat – in defeat and returning home in that defeat. But actually, they are moving forward – that haggard army of punks. Teenagers, and a little older, with that expected stance, that look, that melancholy stare in their eyes, that reckless head of hair, that slight sloppiness about their manner and adress, tight blue jeans, boots, loud shirts, this is that army. It is an endless file. It is growing, expanding minutely. It is a constant threat to the homosexual, to his security, his peace of mind. Its otive is to threaten, blackmail, molest, and to break. It is a menace that cannot be quenched.

Today, because of it, the homosexual is the most persecuted man on earth. If the Negro feels that he is persecuted, he has only to look about him at the homosexual. Even the Negro homosexual has it easier than the white homosexual, for the Negro understands his race and the white man does not understand his.

Even the Toro's, masculine though the are, are victimized, and by the so called straights. How misrpresented that one word is. How unappropriate. For the straight, even without his talent, his ambitions, his sometimes immorality, his often shallow interior, deliberately attempts to degrade the Toro, to try and make him appear inferior by their own outward display of superiority. It forces the Toro to live two roles, one

for the world to see, the other for his world.

Yet, the Toro is advancing, despite this physical and mental strain. He is advancing and, unlike the minority groups wth their racial disputes, the riots, the demands for freedom of expression, the Toro is doing it without lifting a finger.

The women are doing it for him.

The fact that they are unsexing themselves, the fact that they are taking positions in fields predominately for the male, the fact that they are adapting men's at tire, are pushing he husband, the lover, into the arms, and into the bed, of the Toro.

Men are beginning to prefer a man's roughness to women's velvet slaps, his masterful demands less wearing than her silent criticism.

The Toro is the happinest man in the world today. He is usually good looking in physical appearance, is almost always well built, is athletic, is educated, is broad minded, is set finanically. Holds the top place in the world on talent, is the best dressed, and is free.

The society that has bred him, and is constantly attempting to exile him, has failed. The Toro refuses to be exiled.

So – it is almost done.

I have come to the end of my journey.

Once, long ago, when I was very young, I wanted to be buried in a silver casket, with its upper portion made of glass so that the world could see my face. I wanted six talwart males to be my pallbearers, and to be dressed like the space men in my science fiction novels, with glittering helmets, emerald plummed, glittering briefs of chain mail silver, cut shortly to reveal bronzed arms and thighs gleaming in a southern sun.

But not now.

When I die I want to be buried in a wooden casket. I do not want flowers. Instead, I want my casket covered with pine boughs broken from the pine trees on my father's property, and I want to be buried in that little narrow gap in split rock, and with the hopes that nature, in its merciless, murdering heart, will close that gap, sealing over the reality that I ever existed at all. There I can lie and think of all those I have loved and was loved by in return. For there will be no hurry. I

will have an eternity if an eternity is needed.

I will think of Norman, with his callous desire to prove himself a man – and Maurice. Once after the war I saw him in Jackson. He had changed greatly. He actually walked effeminate, and his dark hair was coiffered like a woman's. I saw him from across Capitol street. He was getting into a car with an elderly man, obviously a queer.

I will think of Luther who loved me utterly, loving me so profoundly his mind absorbed the image of me that I was a girl. I do not think he ever completely distinguished between the two, for he saw no disgrace in telling of that love to his parents.

I will think of Cisco on the islands, so guilt ridden he had to share that guilt with others, to whiten his ego by darkening mine.

I will think of Stanley Miller, a true prince, waiting until the eve of his death to confess his love for boys, and I will think of Myrka Ray, tricked into having sex with me, and loving it so much he could not quit.

I will think of Suny, who once said: "I hope I die first. I could not find courage to cut pine limbs and put them on your coffin."

And I will think of Erik – Erik waiting at the top of the stairs. I hope he will always wait. I hope he will wait until that day comes when my old nightmares will have fled and I can give myself to him as he deserves, give myself profoundly, my heart, my body, my mind.

In my silent grave, my eternal home, I will not think of the rapists. Mercifully, and thankfully, after all three years of life, the agony of life, there will be no pains to remind me of them. In death, ther is no pain.

Now I stand at the edge of the sky. Above the horizon and not below it. As long as I live, no one is going to put me down, to accuse me, nor try to make me feel inferior again. I am going to be more than merely tolerated. I am going to be accepted.

At last, my mind recalls an old saying of my great aunt's, one which I think appropriate for all the mannequins and Toro's in this world.

"Love is like water in a cup. It shapes itself to the vessel that contains it."

THE END

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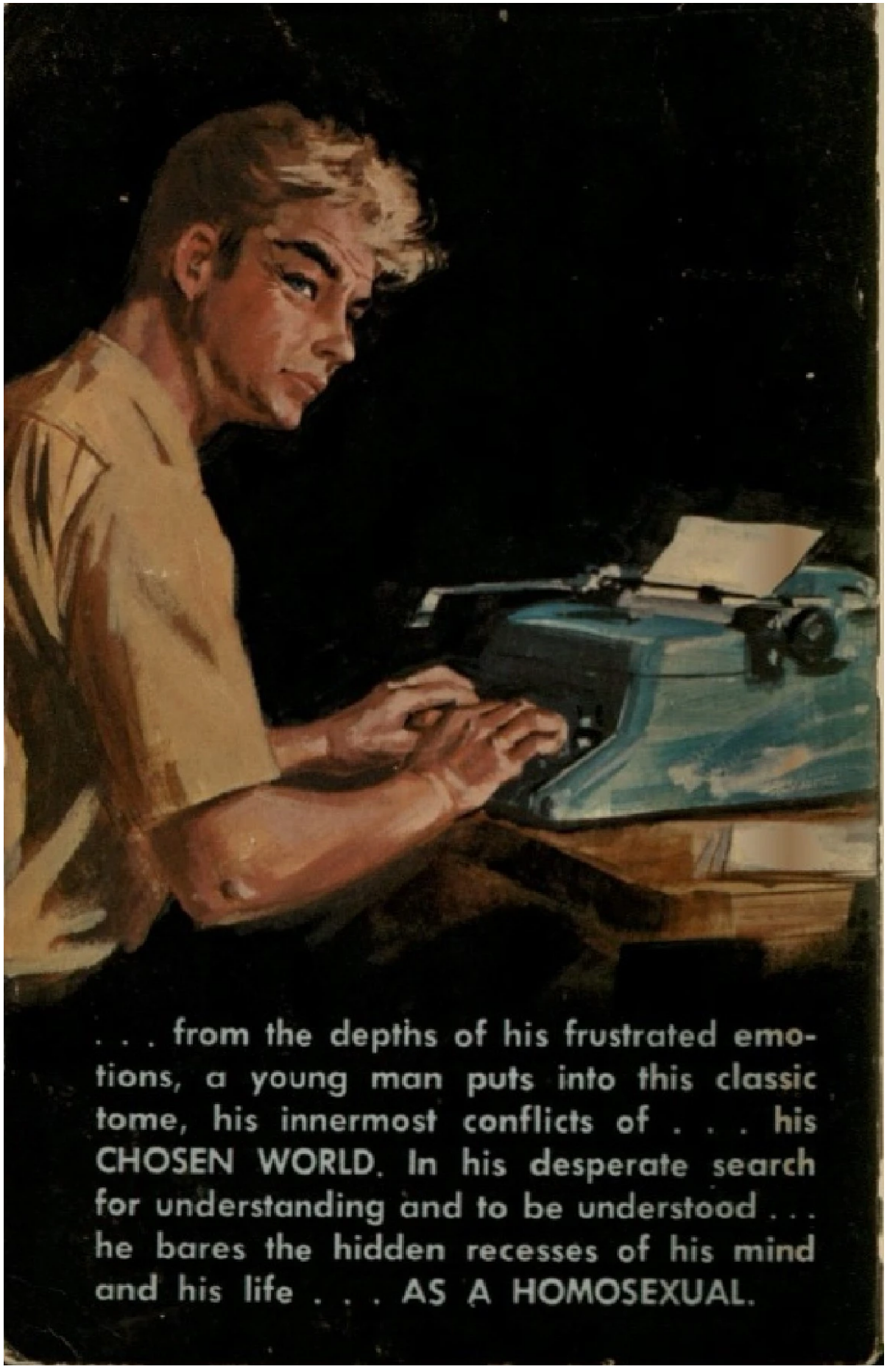

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